PLANNING FROM THE FRINGES:
WOMEN'S ORGANIZED ACTION AND COMMUNITY PLANNING
A Case Study of the Nicola Valley Women in Action, Merritt, B.C.

by

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ABSTRACT

Women's community organizing for change has the potential to improve many aspects of women's lives, the lives of their families, and community members at large. Yet the role of women's organized action in shaping the social environment is not well understood and is rarely supported by the mainstream institutions of planning. In rural areas, women's contributions to community planning may be even less apparent given the voluntary nature of their work and the lack of sensitivity paid to women's particular needs.

The purpose of this study is to contribute to contemporary planning thought by providing some insight into why, to what extent, and how women successfully organize to meet their social needs in rural communities. Two themes are examined: (1) the motivating factors that led to the development of a women's planning organization, the Nicola Valley Women in Action, (NVWIA) in Merritt, B.C., and; (2) the dynamic forces in this community that support and/or limit women's abilities to engage in gender-informed community planning.

A literature review outlines the need for gender-sensitive approaches to planning and the potential of women's community organizing for change (feminist activism) to serve as a catalyst for gender-sensitive planning praxis. To explore the experiences of a particular group of women engaged in community organizing from a feminist perspective, a case study of the NVWIA is described through a review of organizational material and interviews with members.

The principal findings are: (1) there was a definite need for gender-sensitive planning to meet the social needs of women in Merritt; (2) factors such as the lack of gender-sensitivity in institutional planning, the existence of barriers to women's involvement, and the dearth of opportunities for women in Merritt to influence decision-making motivated the development of the NVWIA; (3) opportunities, including government incentive, municipal support, inter-agency co-operation,
organizing skills and member initiative, enabled the NVWIA to successfully respond to women's needs; and (4) constraints, including the absence of funding, philosophical differences, anti-feminist sentiment, and limits to voluntary time, hinder the ability of the NVWIA to continue its efforts.

The study highlights the value of supporting women's community organizing as a means of encouraging planning approaches in rural areas that are gender-sensitive. It concludes by identifying the implications for self-help and professional planners wishing to support women's organized action.
# TABLE OF CONTENTS

**ABSTRACT** ii  
**TABLE OF CONTENTS** iv  
**LIST OF TABLES** vii  
**ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS** viii

## CHAPTER 1 INTRODUCTION AND OVERVIEW

1.0 Introduction 1  
1.1 Purpose Of The Study 1  
1.2 Motivation For The Research And Problem Statement 3  
1.3 Methods Of Research 5  
1.4 Organization Of The Research 7

## CHAPTER 2 LITERATURE REVIEW OF GENDER AND PLANNING

2.0 Introduction 8  
2.1 Definition Of Concepts 9  
2.2 The Demand For Gender-Sensitive Planning Approaches 12  
2.3 The Need For Gender-Sensitive Planning In Rural Areas in Canada 17  
2.4 Women's Community Organizing for Change 20  
2.5 Issues Seldom Addressed By The Literature 24  
2.6 Conclusion 25

## CHAPTER 3 INTRODUCTION TO THE CASE STUDY

3.0 Introduction 26  
3.1 Background on the Community 26  
   3.1.1 Demographic Characteristics 26  
   3.1.2 Economy And Employment 27  
   3.1.3 Community Leadership 29  
3.2 Community Planning And Development Issues In Merritt 29  
3.3 Introduction to the Nicola Valley Women In Action Society 35  
3.4 Purpose of the Nicola Valley Women In Action Society 37
CHAPTER 4 THE EXPERIENCES OF WOMEN INVOLVED IN THE NICOLA VALLEY WOMEN IN ACTION SOCIETY

4.0 Introduction 48

4.1 Members' Motivation for Involvement 48  
4.1.1 Founding Members 48
4.1.2 Newer Members 49

4.2 The Influence and Value of a Feminist Approach 50  
4.2.1 Founding Members 51
4.2.2 Newer Members 51

4.3 Members' Perceptions of the Barriers Facing Women In Merritt 54  
4.3.1 Lack of Services 54
4.3.2 Prevalence Of Violence And Abuse 55
4.3.3 Ethno-Cultural Barriers 55
4.3.4 Limited Support For Feminist Activism 56

4.4 Members' Perceptions of their Role in the Community 57  
4.4.1 Raising Awareness Of Women's Issues 57
4.4.2 Providing Service And Support For Victims Of Abuse 58
4.4.3 Addressing The Needs Of Ethno-Cultural Minorities 58
4.4.4 Confronting Anti-feminist Attitudes 59

4.5 The Response from The Community 59  
4.5.1 The Response From Women Outside The Organization 60
4.5.2 The Response From Men In The Community 60
4.5.3 The Response From City Council 62
4.5.4 The Response From Other Social Service Agencies 63

4.6 Conclusion 64
CHAPTER 5 ANALYSIS OF WOMEN'S ORGANIZED ACTION IN MERRITT

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Section</th>
<th>Page</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>5.0 Introduction</td>
<td>65</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5.1 Motivating Forces</td>
<td>66</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5.1.1 Changing Community Characteristics</td>
<td>66</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5.1.2 Lack of Gender-Sensitivity in Planning</td>
<td>67</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5.1.3 Lack of Opportunities to Influence Decision-Making</td>
<td>69</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5.2 Opportunities For Gender-Sensitive Community Organizing</td>
<td>70</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5.2.1 Government Incentive</td>
<td>70</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5.2.2 Support from the Mayor</td>
<td>71</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5.2.3 Interagency Co-operation</td>
<td>72</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5.2.4 Leadership Skills and Abilities of the Founding Members</td>
<td>72</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5.2.5 Proactive Incremental Approach</td>
<td>73</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5.3 Barriers to Gender-Sensitive Community Organizing</td>
<td>74</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5.3.1 Lack of Long Term Funding</td>
<td>74</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5.3.2 Lack of a Representative Membership</td>
<td>75</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5.3.3 Institutional Obligations</td>
<td>77</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5.3.4 Lack of a Shared Ideological Commitment</td>
<td>78</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5.3.5 Anti-feminist Sentiment</td>
<td>80</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5.3.6 Limits to Voluntary Time and Energy</td>
<td>80</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5.4 The Value Of Planning “From the Fringes”</td>
<td>81</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5.4.1 Raising Awareness of Issues of Diversity</td>
<td>83</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5.4.2 Fostering Self-Determination</td>
<td>83</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5.4.3 Acknowledging the Barriers that Limit Women’s Participation</td>
<td>84</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5.4.4 Supporting Women’s Basic and Strategic Needs</td>
<td>85</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5.5 Implications For Community Planning</td>
<td>85</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5.5.1 Implications for Federal and Provincial Planners</td>
<td>85</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5.5.2 Implications for Local Government and Municipal Planning</td>
<td>87</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5.5.3 Implications for Self-Help Planners</td>
<td>90</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5.5.4 Implications for the Development of Gender-Sensitive Planning Theory</td>
<td>92</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5.6 Conclusion</td>
<td>94</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

BIBLIOGRAPHY

APPENDICES
LIST OF TABLES

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>TABLE</th>
<th>Description</th>
<th>Page</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>TABLE 1</td>
<td>Major Employers in Merritt, 1990</td>
<td>28</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>TABLE 2</td>
<td>A List of Planning Reports Reviewed</td>
<td>31</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>TABLE 3</td>
<td>A List of Community-based Research Documents Reviewed</td>
<td>32</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>TABLE 4</td>
<td>Top Twelve Issues Rated Very Important To Women In The Nicola Valley</td>
<td>41</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>TABLE 5</td>
<td>Recommendations Made by the Nicola Valley Women's Community Needs Assessment</td>
<td>43</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
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CHAPTER 1

INTRODUCTION AND OVERVIEW

1.0 Introduction

This study is about women's community organizing for change in a small, resource-based community in British Columbia. Women's community organizing for change improves many aspects of women's lives, the lives of their families and community members at large. It provides a means of self-help for women in crisis, raises community awareness of women's (and other marginalized group's) particular situation and needs in society, and empowers women to take an active role in developing the kinds of services and amenities that will improve their quality of life. Yet the role of women's organized action in shaping the social environment in rural areas is not well understood and is rarely supported by the mainstream institutions of planning. The challenges that women face in their attempts to collectively involve themselves in public policy and decision-making have only recently begun to be explored by feminist planning theorists.

1.1 Purpose of the Study

The purpose of this study is to contribute to contemporary planning thought by providing some insight into why, to what extent, and how women successfully organize to meet their social needs in smaller communities. Specifically, this thesis examines two themes: (1) the motivating factors that led to the development of a women's planning organization (the Nicola Valley Women in Action) in Merritt British Columbia, and; (2) the dynamic forces in Merritt that support and/or limit the ability of the Nicola Valley Women in Action to engage in gender-sensitive community planning.
Merritt is a community I was affiliated with while working on a social development project (Getting on With the Job! in Merritt) in 1993 with the Social Planning and Research Council of British Columbia. Through my participation in this project, I had the opportunity to meet members of the Nicola Valley Women in Action and become familiar with the organization's activities. I was particularly intrigued by this organization since they were a rural-based organization of women undertaking community social planning from a feminist perspective, although they did not refer to their activities as such. To explore the experiences of, and the opportunities and constraints faced by this particular group of women, a case study of the Nicola Valley Women in Action (NVWIA) is undertaken.

The literature review provides an understanding of the need for gender-sensitive planning, especially in the context of rural Canadian communities. It briefly outlines the potential of women's community organizing for change to act as a catalyst for gender-sensitive planning in rural areas. The research describes how the NVWIA actively involved themselves in community affairs and reveals the women's personal perceptions of planning "from the fringes" by examining their perspectives on the role of the organization in the community and its ability to effect change. Following the presentation of the research findings, the study identifies the motivating factors that led to the NVWIA's involvement in community social planning (i.e., the dynamics that led to the formation of the organization); and the opportunities for and constraints to women's community organizing for change in Merritt. The study shows the value of women's community organizing for change as a means of encouraging gender-sensitive planning approaches in rural areas. It concludes by identifying the implications for community-based and professional planners wishing to support women's organized action.
1.2 Motivation for the Research and Problem Statement

As stated earlier, my interest in women's involvement in community planning grew from personal experience working on a social development project based in Merritt in the spring of 1993. At the time, Merritt was suffering from a number of economic problems typically faced by resource-based areas: high unemployment, resource depletion, and undeveloped alternative economic development opportunities. Social issues particular to the area included a high rate of alcohol dependency, violence, domestic abuse, as well as a lack of appropriate services to address these problems. The population was split along three cultural lines and was experiencing incidents of racial discrimination. Although several studies and professional planning reports had made recommendations on how to improve the economic, social and environmental well-being of the community, somehow 'planning' seemed to be failing to provide effective strategies to overcome the complex set of factors detrimentally affecting this community.

It was also my observation that several community-based initiatives had evolved in an attempt to address the various problems facing the community. Some of the groups were government sponsored, others were grass-roots. Groups included an Economic Development Committee, a Community Futures Association, a Healthy Communities Committee and a locally organized Community Land Use and Resource Group. In their efforts to raise awareness of particular community issues and to promote change, these community-based groups had undertaken what might be referred to as community social planning.

One group in particular, a women's organization, caught my attention. This organization had conducted their own research, prepared a report outlining recommendations for community betterment and undertaken both collaborative and individual community projects. They had effectively identified issues of importance and were sponsoring direct services to tackle some of the community's most pressing social issues. What interested me most about this group, beside
the fact that it was made up entirely of women, was their approach—holistic, proactive, and
gender-sensitive community social planning. The organization was grass-roots and voluntary,
yet it appeared to be successfully addressing needs that had been overlooked by institutional
community planning processes. The need to test the accuracy of my observations and to further
explore how this organization managed to involve themselves in such an effective manner form
the basis of this research.

A review of the literature on women in the community suggests that women have always been
very active in their communities, and have historically involved themselves in creating
communities that reflect their own values (Hewitt 1984, Birch 1983). However, the number of
women participating in community politics and or in positions of decision-making capacity is
small (Stonier 1985). Women's contributions to the political, economic and social life of the
community have not always been apparent, or have been downplayed by mainstream planning
thought, given the voluntary (i.e., un-paid) nature of their involvement. Further, women may
wish to play a greater role in the community planning process, but are hindered by a number of
barriers (Gurstein 1994). While some of these barriers may be individual, most of the barriers
are systemic or a result of the way in which planning, as a male-dominated practice, has not
taken into account the special needs of women (Hayden 1980, Mackenzie 1988).

Missing from the literature was an in-depth analysis of how women's groups have successfully
managed to involve themselves in planning and community development issues, or the kinds of
barriers and opportunities women face in their efforts to make planning more relevant to their
needs. What is needed is an assessment of the kind of factors that help or hinder the ability of
community-based women's organizations to contribute to their personal benefit and the benefit
of the community as a whole.
Therefore in the course of this research, three general questions are explored:

(1) What were the motivating factors that led to the development of a female-based planning response, namely the Nicola Valley Women in Action?

(2) Why, to what extent and how did the NVWIA organize to meet the needs of women?

(3) What were the opportunities and constraints that affected the ability of the NVWIA to engage in a gender-sensitive planning strategy?

1.3 Methods of Research

The approach taken by this thesis is primarily what has been described as qualitative or feminist research. It is concerned with filling in the blanks of our knowledge of women and relating this knowledge back to the field of community planning. My research design is based on a descriptive case study method. In particular, information for this study was gathered through three basic research methods:

(1) A review of planning documents, community-based research and organizational literature was conducted as background for the case study. Findings from this review are used to describe the planning context of the community. In addition, a content analysis of planning documents and community-based research was conducted to discover whether "gender perspectives" has been included in these documents. This was done by closely reviewing each document for the inclusion of an analysis based on gender.

Organizational literature produced by the NVWIA was also consulted and referenced as a source of information. Organizational material included notes,

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1 A rationale for the use of feminist research methods, and the case study method in general has been included as Appendix 1.
promotional brochures, letters, minutes and various reports written by members of the organization.

(2) **Participant-observation** was used as a research technique during two occasions: while attending a two-day workshop co-sponsored by the organization in June 1993; and while presenting the thesis proposal during a general meeting held in April 1994. By participating in both these events, the researcher was able to observe the interaction among organizational members, as well as interaction of members with other members of the community.

(3) **In-depth interviews** were conducted with twelve members of the NVWIA in May 1994. Findings from these interviews are described in Chapter Four.

Participants were selected via a presentation of the research proposal and request for research participants during a general meeting in April, 1994. Prior to the research, all participants were asked to sign an agreement to participate (see Appendix 2). Interview participants were presented with an Interview Schedule (see Appendix 3) and asked for their permission to be tape-recorded. All interviews were conducted in Merritt, either in the interviewee's homes, places of work or in a public restaurant. Every attempt was made to create an atmosphere in which participants felt knowledgeable, and interviewees were encouraged to share personal anecdotes and details of their own experiences as they answered the interview questions. In an attempt to establish rapport, interviewees were asked to begin by describing when and how they became involved with the women's group. This helped the women relax and feel comfortable sharing information that was both well-known and relevant. Duration of the interviews ranged from forty five minutes to two hours.

Interviews were tape-recorded where possible, otherwise material was recorded by hand. The interviews were later transcribed and excerpts from these interviews are included (in italics) throughout the paper. The research is enriched by their voices, which qualitatively describe
their perspectives, and disclose a unique and legitimate knowledge base often neglected in
traditional community planning.

1.4 Organization of the Research

The research is organized as follows:

Chapter One introduces the purpose, motivation for the study, the problem statement, methods
of research, and organization of the research.

Chapter Two presents the findings from the literature review on the need for gender-sensitive
approaches to planning.

Chapter Three is a descriptive chapter that introduces the case study. Background information
on the demographic, economic, political and social characteristics facing the City of Merritt is
presented. The history and other relevant features of the organization are then described.

Chapter Four discusses the primary findings gathered from personal interviews describing the
women's experiences of involvement as members of the Nicola Valley Women in Action.

Chapter Five analyses the findings of the research in terms of the motivating factors and
opportunities and constraints for women's community organizing for change. Implications of the
findings for planning and community development are discussed.
CHAPTER 2

LITERATURE REVIEW OF GENDER-SENSITIVE PLANNING

2.0 Introduction

There is a growing demand for alternative approaches to planning that are more integrated, gender-inclusive, and relevant than mainstream planning traditions (Sandercock and Forsyth 1992). Alternative approaches are necessary given the crisis in planning - that is, the "crisis in the state's ability to satisfy the legitimate needs of the people" (Friedmann 1987:312). The crisis that communities now face is a direct result of the values and assumptions that underlie our prevailing economic system (Friedmann 1987). Current frameworks informing traditional economic development are unsustainable, unecological and even damaging to the needs of citizens in communities (Plant and Plant 1990). In addition, current frameworks all too often are gender-biased, and insensitive to the values and specific needs in a diverse society.

In society today, there remains an overwhelming reliance on economic growth and development as a means of obtaining "the good life." All too often, growth and development are pursued at the expense of fundamental social and environmental values. Needs are measured in reference to different sectors that influence quality of life, such as employment, housing, education, and health care. There are two fundamental problems with sectoral approaches to measuring community well-being (Hay et al. 1993:58). One problem relates to the lack of attention paid to the interrelationship between the sectors since measurements are often made in isolation of each other. The other fundamental problem is the lack of community values and principles informing these measurements. Indicators created to measure community well-being are defined by outsiders/experts who do not have a true sense of what is important to communities or what their values are (Hayes and Willms 1990).
Efforts at improving community well-being through a community development approach are now being led by social movements each with their own theoretical perspective and practical approach to meeting the needs of individuals and communities. The growth and diversity of social movements reflect the increasing number of "claims-makers" (Kerans and Drover in Hay et al. 1993:58), or different groups in society who are now articulating their needs and preferences. This phenomenon raises several questions as to how planning is carried out in a small community, who is involved, and on what basis planning and public policy decisions are made. It also raises questions about the role of community-based groups in the processes of planning for integrated community well-being, especially groups that advocate a different approach to community well-being (one that extends beyond the traditional economic development objectives of rural planning).

With the introduction of the above background information, the focus of this chapter will be an examination of the discussions on the need for alternative (gender-sensitive) approaches to community planning, and the potential of women's community organizing to act as a catalyst for gender-sensitive planning in rural areas. The literature review concludes with a section outlining issues seldom addressed by the literature, in particular, the dearth of practical examples of feminist informed community planning, and the lack of information identifying barriers and constraints for gender-sensitive planning in rural areas.

2.1 Definitions of Concepts

Before further examining the literature outlining the need for alternative community planning approaches, it is first necessary to define some key concepts and terms. The purpose of this section is to explain the underlying theoretical concepts that form the basis of this study.

1. Gender-sensitive or gender aware planning is a relatively new concept in planning theory, one that has not been discussed much outside of international development planning or
within the feminist community (Wallace 1991). Although a clear definition of gender-sensitive planning does not yet exist, Moser (1991:158) contends that gender planning is based on the understanding that because men and women play different roles in society, they often have different needs. Therefore when identifying and implementing planning needs it is important to disaggregate households and families within communities on the basis of gender, identifying men and women, boys and girls.

She continues,

if planning is to succeed it has to be gender aware. It has to develop the capacity to differentiate not only on the basis of income, now commonly accepted, but also on the basis of gender. It is important to emphasize that the rationale for gender planning does not ignore other important issues such as race, ethnicity and class, but focuses specifically on gender precisely because this tends to be subsumed within class in so much policy and planning (Moser 1991:159).

Ideally, a gender-sensitive approach to planning recognizes the diversity of needs and experiences in community which are dictated by our gendered roles and responsibilities and attempts to counter the influence of gender on women's access and control over resources, their day-to-day activities, and living conditions. It does so by incorporating and accounting for the influence of gender in all planning and policy initiatives.

2. Institutional or mainstream planning describes the institutional responses carried out by professional planners and government agents in order to address issues of importance, make rational decisions, and formulate public policy in the interest of the general community. Mainstream urban and rural planning initiatives are often flawed since they are 'gender-blind' and therefore fail to adequately recognize how development plans and public policies differentially affect the lives of women and men according to their gendered roles and expectations.
3. Gender is a socially constructed concept that ascribes certain expectations to women or men and their political, economic and social roles and responsibilities in society (Andrew and Milroy 1988:i).

4. Women's organized action or community organizing for change is defined as collective activities undertaken in communities by women for women (Adamson et al. 1988). These activities, while focusing on women's needs and women's issues, translate local knowledge into local action and in turn enhance the quality of life or level of community well-being of women and the community at large. This "active organizing for change has been referred to as feminist practice: what feminists actually do in order to bring about change" (Adamson et al. 1988:165). The term women's community organizing emphasizes both the grass-roots nature of the activity and the need for a re conceptualization of "planning" as an inclusive concept that recognizes the value of women's activism to improve the social opportunities, participation, justice, and equality of women in community.

5. Community well-being is used in this study to denote the broadest goal of community planning and grass-roots organizing for change. Well-being has been defined as the promotion of social processes that foster self-determination and develop personal capacities in the context of mutual interdependence and equality (Hay et al. 1993:3-6). Defining well-being in this way signifies a movement away from the assumptions of objective social and economic progress (based on economic performance) to a values-based approach to conceptualizing and measuring community well-being (Hay et al. 1993). It is the premise of this study that community planners should be aware of the need for an integrated, gender-sensitive approach in their efforts to foster community well-being.
2.2 The Demand for Gender-Sensitive Planning Approaches

Critiques of traditional planning theory are now being led by feminists who find much fault with the basic, underlying assumptions of mainstream planning (Gurstein 1994; Sandercock and Forsyth 1992; Birkeland 1991; Mackenzie 1988; Hayden 1984). From the standpoint of feminist planning theorists, planning must become more inclusive and more sensitive to diversity, gender and cultural differences, in order to be more legitimate to a wider population. Gurstein (1994:1) speaks of the need "to change the centre of gravity" in the planning profession to encompass women's knowledge and experience. Such a change is necessary since planning has been a male-dominated and male-biased practice that has traditionally neglected the needs and experiences of women (Milroy 1991; Leavitt 1986; Saegart 1980; Hayden 1980).

Of particular interest to feminists is how planning is based on traditional economic thought and rational decision-making, and how this has devalued subjective knowledge as a legitimate way of knowing. In the past, there was a strong belief that sound, technical advice of planning experts would enable society to manage the factors that determine collective well-being. The rational or synoptic theory of planning was widely accepted as the dominant tradition by which planners and policy makers utilized technical reason to explore and evaluate possible courses of action (Friedmann 1987). Through the planning process, planners attempted to make decisions based on community goals. Hence, an implicit assumption of the rational planning paradigm is the existence of a general public interest. Rational planning adherents believed that a general interest could be formulated through the instrumentalities and procedures of planning, that most people of good will would subscribe to such an interest, and that it was therefore safe to suppose that the consensus necessary for democratic planning might actually be obtained (Friedmann 1989:166).
In this context, it was assumed that comprehensive and positivist public decision-making about public use of land and other resources was not only probable, it was preferential. Planning decisions were delegated to professional planners, experts trained and paid to make rational decisions based on the general interest.

The notion of a "general interest" is particularly suspect given the shifting nature of our society i.e., economic restructuring, changing family structures, an aging population and increasing ethno-cultural diversity and the growing number of "claims-makers". As Gurstein (1994:1) points out, many of the assumptions that underlie the dominant planning paradigm are now being contested, whereby "[t]he rational model of planning based on a world of stable entities is no longer valid in a world of fragmentation and multiple frameworks". For example, past models of planning assumed that communities were homogeneous units with ideal types of groups (i.e., the nuclear family) and universal notions of community needs (Gurstein 1994). Feminists have aptly pointed out that needs differ according to one's gender and, therefore, planning should acknowledge a diversity of needs and a multiplicity of experiences in the formulation of public policy.

Gender roles ascribe certain socially-constructed expectations on women (and men) and their political, economic and social responsibilities in society. Professional planners often fail to take into account the different roles and activities women and men perform in society and the influence of gender roles on the reality of women's lives and their relationship to the environment (Hayden 1980). As a result, feminists contend that planning, as a profession traditionally dominated by white males, has adopted a perspective that to some extent meets the needs of the dominant sex at the expense of others (Saegart 1980).

Literature on women and environments has been instrumental in revealing how many planning concepts are based on a socially constructed idea of gender. Researchers inform us that the logic
of the urban structure in the past depended on socially constructed, as opposed to biologically determined, gender specific roles and activities as "women's biological capacity to reproduce was socially translated into a primary responsibility for child care and, in many societies, a responsibility for other aspects of social reproduction" (Mackenzie 1988:15).

Saegart (1980) reveals how land-use planning reinforced the dichotomy between male and female gender roles through the spatial and functional separation of productive and reproductive activities that centralized women's activities in the home. Historically, work done in the home was seen as private and reproductive in nature, tending to the "essential leisure time functions such as eating, resting, learning, loving, and expressing feeling [that] became secondary to work..." (Mackenzie 1988:17-18). Given that women's social roles and responsibilities were centered in the home, the home and neighbourhood became known as the women's sphere. The design and resulting infrastructure of neighbourhoods privileged the activities of the dominant gender (males) while oppressing women by limiting their access to opportunities outside the home. This phenomenon has been explored by Saegart (1980) in the context of suburban areas, where a woman's potential to successfully combine private (domestic) activities and public (productive) activities is limited by the very nature of her environment--characterized by lower densities, and the lack of public transportation, child care facilities, family support services, and viable housing alternatives.

As relations of production and reproduction have changed, gender roles have also undergone a transition to the point where women's prime responsibilities and roles are now in flux--no longer are women's work spheres confined to the home. More and more women are entering the paid work force; however, gendered expectations about a woman's place and role in society remain virtually unaffected (Hayden 1984; Leavitt and Saegart 1984; Wekerle 1988). These kinds of trends illustrate the need to consider gender specific questions about the process and results of planning. In the past, "planning practice proceeded on the assumption that both the intentions
and outcomes of planning are gender-neutral, though women are affected in exactly the same ways as men ... as though women’s experience of [community] is the same as that of men” (Sandercock and Forsyth 1990:7-8).

Feminist research has also been instrumental in exposing the factors that dictate women’s experiences of community life. For example, “women are more likely than men to receive public assistance, as single parents, as the dominant elderly population group, as residents in public housing, or as the majority users of public transport” (Sandercock and Forsyth 1992:53).

Trends indicate that women both make up a larger percentage of the poor and run a higher risk of poverty than men in most categories....women have fewer options when it comes to access to employment, affordable housing, child care and other services. They depend on public amenities more than men do, yet typically, they are not involved in decisions which affect the provision, location and design of these amenities and services....And more broadly, women are largely the beneficiaries of public policies, yet public policies do not overtly recognize this fact (Hemmingson 1994:2).

These trends represent factors that shape how women experience and use the built environment, relate to one another and gain and use resources. At the same time, these trends often create barriers that hinder a woman’s ability to successfully manage her daily life and involve herself in community life. Due to a number of barriers, women are still not as comfortable, confident or as numerous in public life as men. Stonier (1985:147) found that

Women, as outsiders in the male-dominated public decision-making process, find it more difficult to gain access to positions of political power, ...they are not often in the association through which power over public decision-making is organized, and ... they are seldom active in the issues deemed important to the dominant cliques of men.

Unfortunately, planning decisions and the formulation of public policy have ignored the circumstances of women’s reality or presumed it to be no different than men’s. Even though women do not use the built environment in the same way that men do, even though women on the whole are poorer than men and less likely to be involved in the planning process, gender
differences in planning continue to be dismissed and as a result, women’s needs are neglected (Leavitt 1986).

The relative lack of involvement of women in formal community positions is interesting given the fact that, in principle, the community field has been defined as the woman’s sphere. Historically women have envisioned themselves as community caretakers and sources of social stability (Hewitt 1984). It was women who took their nurturing characteristics out of the home and into the community, as teachers, public nurses, social workers and volunteers, in an attempt to secure the social and cultural welfare of their communities. Despite the involvement of women in community life, overall women’s public activities are seen as socially or morally motivated while men’s activities are hailed as political (Stonier 1985). Rowbotham (1992:16) notes “the idea that women and politics should not mix is extremely ancient. Political organization among women, especially poor and uneducated women, has frequently been regarded as a trespass on the public domain of power”.

Consequently, women’s contributions to the larger processes of social, political and economic transformations have often been voluntary, and, as a result, their limited involvement in formal civic activity has confined them to the informal sphere --to the "fringes"--since the extent of their work is outside the productive sphere of activity. Women’s contributions are now becoming more apparent as feminist researchers document the role that women have played in improving the day to day living conditions of community life. Griffiths (1993:xiii) remarks that her interest in writing the history of the National Council of Women was captured since she had "long felt that women’s philanthropy has been consistently overlooked and undervalued." She writes,

Considering the place of women in the community it is interesting how often work in volunteer organizations is overlooked. This is, perhaps, because one of the most pernicious half-truths about the content of women’s lives has been the idea that, in the past, it had no public component and no impact upon the judgment and development of community affairs. The truth, in this half-truth,
In summary, feminist planning theorists have been instrumental in enumerating the reasons why planning as a rational, male-biased process must be reformulated to take into account the needs and circumstances of women's lives. Factors such as the male-biased values that underlie objective planning, gendered assumptions of the social, physical, economic and political environment, the diversity of women's experiences and the marginalization of women's contributions to public life all point to the need for a more gender-sensitive approach to planning.

2.3 The Need for Gender-Sensitive Planning in Rural Areas in Canada

The concept of gender-sensitive or aware planning is most often used in the context of international development in the developing world (see for example Wallace and March, eds. 1991). Nevertheless, a gender approach to planning is also desirable for women in rural areas of the Western Hemisphere. Women in rural areas in Canada face many of the same challenges as women elsewhere. Women's roles and responsibilities in rural Canada often include both reproductive work and productive work, as well as community managing work; and are complicated by the socio-economic conditions unique to Canadian rural or resource based regions.

Challenges facing women in smaller Canadian cities are many. For example, women in rural or resource-based areas often must contend with geographical isolation, the lack of facilities and basic social services, and the lack of value attributed to their voluntary contributions to community life. When compounded by such trends such as changing family structures, the rise in the number of women in the paid work force, and economic restructuring, the opportunities open to women in rural or resource-based areas of Canada tend to be limited.
Wall (1993:14) informs us that recent studies demonstrate women in resource dependent communities have many concerns about the physical design and lack of facilities in their communities. They also face many barriers in their efforts to address their concerns. Women's attempts to organize themselves in rural areas are frustrated by isolation, where "geographic distance, ...few resources, lack of access to political decision makers, time constraints and limited support for feminist ideals" make it difficult for women to collectively seek empowerment and liberation (Graveline et al. 1991:134).

The lack of appropriate services for women in non-urban areas is hardly surprising given the history of underfunding for community and social planning in such areas. A survey of social concerns in non-metropolitan British Columbia conducted in 1991, indicated that the financial resources in smaller communities were the least adequate for the following issues - child abuse, affordable housing, needs of single parent families, youth resources, poverty/hunger and the abuse of women (Trevelyan 1991:13).

This information is particularly devastating for women residing in rural areas, since many, if not all, of these issues directly limit their ability to lead a full and productive lives. Women, as opposed to men, have always held the major responsibility for children; constitute the majority of single parents; and tend to be hardest hit by poverty, especially as single mothers and seniors (Leavitt 1986). The lack of support services for single parents, the deficiency of public or affordable housing, and the non-existence of public transportation systems in rural areas further reduce women's choices, time and ability to combine domestic and public activities. Women's centers and feminist-informed community services that could potentially circumvent issues of low self esteem, domestic violence, sexual abuse, and the need for child care, affordable housing, employment, training, etc. are rarely available in rural settings, and if available, struggle to exist in a sometimes hostile environment, unsympathetic to feminist analysis (Adamson et al. 1988).
Challenges facing women are exacerbated by the socio-economic conditions unique to rural or resource based regions. The development problems facing resource dependent communities in Canada are numerous and severe. Women are particularly effected by two factors - a more traditional division of labour between the genders, and the presence of economic instability. First, in resource areas gendered roles are more traditional or rigid and gender-segmented work forces are even more entrenched given the predominance of employment opportunities in traditional, [male dominated] primary industries such as forestry, mining, milling, agriculture etc. Women in resource dependent towns have fewer choices in securing meaningful employment and are often relegated to the lower paying yet more stable occupations available in these communities, such as retail, service and human care services. Shift work, and the lack of child care and public transportation have prevented some women from taking an active role in community affairs.

Second, the economic future of Canada's resource-dependent regions is not promising given the "disparities between the traditional rural industries and the current growth sectors of the national economy in terms of international competitiveness" (Freshwater et al. 1991:2). Combined with severity of environmental problems, resource depletion and the need for sustainable land use practice, resource-consuming rural industries are de-emphasized. This often leads to a higher loss of traditional resource jobs among men than women. Consequently, women may eventually end up supporting spouses and families through boom and bust cycles. The loss of jobs and chronic unemployment among men holds special concern to women, in terms of increased responsibilities and the potential threats to family health and safety. The inability to cope with the prolonged stress caused by unemployment and poverty may result in greater levels of family violence, alcoholism, and relationship breakdown among both men and women.
The exclusion of much of women's work from conventional community economic development has also had a detrimental effect on women in rural areas (Alderson et al. 1993). For example, housework, the reproduction and nurturance of human life, and community work are all excluded by the formal economic system's notion of productivity since they are unpaid and invisible. Women's unpaid work in the home and in the community has never been recognized as a critical contribution to the economy. Adair and Howell write

Women's work has always been dismissed - the work of remembering the details, noticing the emotional nuances, keeping the peace...yet these seemingly mundane affairs form the basis of healthy community life. Women's ways weave the substance of community ties. We need to value these sensibilities and move them into public life (Adair and Howell, 1993:39).

In general, conventional economic systems are based on the values and experiences of the dominant sex. As Waring (1988:17) states, "overwhelmingly, those experiences that are economically visible can be summarized as what men do." Community economic development strategies have systematically failed to meet women's objectives for themselves, their families and their communities (Waring 1988). As a result, neither the strengths nor the concerns of women have been well represented in economic programs and policies adopted by municipal governments and communities (Alderson et al. 1993).

2.4 Women's Community Organizing for Change

Although women living in rural areas are faced with many barriers to community involvement in decision-making that would improve their situation, there is evidence that women are able to successfully organize themselves to collectively address challenges to their well-being (Graveline et al., Reddin 1991, Miles 1991). Women's collective organizing for change has been undertaken in communities all over Canada for some time now. These activities focus on the
needs and issues particularly affecting women and families, in an effort to enhance the level of community well-being of women and the community at large.

Excellent accounts of the contemporary women's movement in Canada are available.\(^1\) Self-organization and community development are two of the means by which grass-roots women's groups have historically attempted to legitimize their concerns in democratic societies. Feminists bring about change through grass-roots, proactive and collective organizing activities, advocating values such as equality, inclusion, social justice, self-determination and sustainability (Wine and Ristock 1991). Fundamental to the movement is the emphasis on consciousness-raising, increasing choices for women, taking action and ultimately, gaining more control. Achieving a sense of control over the factors that enhance or impede the well-being of women and men has always been one of the aims of the women's movement. The rights of women to live without violence, to be strong and self-confident members of healthy families, and to have the opportunity to participate as equals in their community are so key to the women's movement that they deserve to be highlighted.

Similarities between the growth of the women's movement and the rise of community action abound: a common historical root as part of the revival of left-wing/protest politics in the 1960s; a focus on urban areas and issues arising from urban crisis, such as "the exploitation and the consequent social and political tensions to be found within the inner city" and the "potential for common theoretical perspectives, stemming from a range of different political positions" (Mayo 1977:x). Many feminist groups start from ad hoc committees that get together simply to talk about women's needs (Reddin 1991:153). Their work attempts to fill the gaps between what a community or group decides is necessary to its continued well-being and what the mainstream system is presently doing to meet its needs (Adamson et al. 1988:56).

\(^1\) For a comprehensive historical account see Adamson, Brisken and McPhail (1988) "Feminist Organizing for Change", and in-depth descriptions of particular features of the movement, see Wine and Ristock (1991) "Women and Social Change: Feminist Activism in Canada".
Just as there are many types of women's organizations, some aiming to change, some aiming to conserve, there are also many ways of describing feminist activism. Differences in feminist politics are often analyzed with reference to traditional political doctrines:

- **Liberal feminists** are not trying to achieve whole-scale restructuring of society, rather they are prepared to accept the system as long as each woman shares an equality of opportunity. They oppose discrimination and barriers that disallow women a fair chance to compete and often concentrate their efforts on "improving educational opportunities for women in order to give them the tools to compete, on changing socialization patterns that shape a feminine personality uncomfortable with competing, and on removing legislation that actively discriminates against women" (Adamson et al. 1988:10).

- **Radical feminists** concentrate on the differences experienced by women and men, based on women's unique ability to reproduce and nurture, and emphasize that the oppression and subordination felt by women is due to their biologically determined role in child-birth (Adamson et al. 1991:9). Radical feminists are motivated by the conviction that the system is wrong and hence argue for full scale transformation from the present system based on male privilege and male control to a non-hierarchical and co-operative society based on female values.

- **Socialist feminists** expand their efforts to challenge all forms of power and systemic oppression arising from differences in class, race, gender and sexual orientation. Socialist feminists "argue that equality of opportunity can never be attained in Canadian society as long as there are fundamental differences in wealth, privilege, and power " based on the above-mentioned differences (Adamson et al. 1991:11).

The labels described above are rarely used by grass-roots women's organizations in smaller communities to distinguish themselves; rather they represent academic's attempts to compare and classify different streams of feminist activism. In many smaller Canadian cities, the women's community is often not comfortable with the term "feminism" and shy away from associating themselves with anything feminist in fear of negative reactions from the
community. Women's general resistance to being labeled "feminist" has been documented by many (Kamen 1991; Faludi 1991; Adamson et al. 1988). According to Adamson et al. (1988:12-15) the reluctance of many women to label themselves feminist can be explained by two factors: distortion by the media of the images and issues of feminism, and perceptions of a negative response especially from the men in their lives. Often the media concentrates on the resistance to feminism that is embedded in the dominant ideology and mainstream institutions rather than the positive changes that have resulted from the work of feminists and the women's movement.

Nonetheless, examples of feminist community planning in British Columbia can be found. They include a project entitled Planning Ourselves In, undertaken by a group of female planners in conjunction with women residing in a suburban neighbourhood in "an attempt to promote awareness of gender issues, especially from a planning perspective" and "to work with communities of women to determine how community planning can best meet their needs" (Planning Action 1992:4). This project represented an explicit approach to incorporate diversity (measured in terms of gender) into our perception of community planning.

Another recent study looked at the existence of feminist-informed community advocacy in an urban setting of Nanaimo (Callahan and Matthews 1992). This research examined what happened when women addressed a controversial social issue, in this case abortion rights, at the community level. The authors described feminist community work as being "founded on the central belief that power imbalances in society created by patriarchal, capitalist traditions are fundamentally responsible for the oppression of women. The overall aim of women's community work is to challenge and change these traditions" (Callahan and Matthews 1992:128).

Feminist community work also aims to change traditional approaches to community organizing. It is based on the premise that women must fully participate in the institutions and processes that shape their lives so that
these can be changed or replaced in ways that are compatible with their needs. Feminist community organizing differs from other kinds of community work in that it includes new forms of practice, such as "consciousness-raising, collective organizational structures, the development of a social movement, and building connections with other oppressed groups" (Callahan and Matthews 1992: 128).

2.5 Issues Seldom Addressed by the Literature

A number of important issues are not addressed by the literature on gender and planning. Interestingly enough, literature on the connections between women's voluntary efforts to address issues of equality and oppression in community life and the need for alternative, gender-sensitive community planning practices is sparse.

Few case studies document, in any detail, the activities and characteristics of women who help shape community well-being. Researchers have begun to highlight the contributions of women in the practice of voluntary and professional community planning. Action research on the role of women in suburban community planning is also available (Planning Ourselves In Group 1994, Gurstein 1994). However, missing from the literature were accounts of successful bottom-up strategies undertaken in rural British Columbia, especially practical examples of women-centered planning and how women themselves perceive their involvement and its influence on the community.

Another issue not discussed in the literature is how planners can support women in their efforts to successfully integrate a gender perspective in community organizing, especially in environments where support for feminism is tenuous among the women themselves, let alone the community at large. Yet there is evidence to suggest that women in rural areas have responded to their many needs by creating community solutions/structures such as a women's organizations

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2 See for example, "From civic worker to city planner: women and planning, 1890-1980", Eugenie Ladner Birch (1983) for an American perspective and "Women Plan Toronto" Reggie Modlich (1986) for a Canadian perspective.
to raise awareness of women's issues, voice their interest in the development of the community and work toward positive change. What is absent from the literature is an analysis of the dynamics in smaller communities that create barriers and opportunities for gender-sensitive planning and the implications of this for self-help and professional planners.

2.6 Conclusion

It is this researcher's belief that women's community organizing for change holds the potential for promoting holistic and gender-sensitive community planning, or the type of development that benefits women's status, rights to participate, levels of equality and overall situation in the community, by addressing those issues that hinder the involvement of women in formal community. Therefore the purpose of this thesis is to contribute to the literature on the role and influence of women's organized action to community planning.

The remainder of this study will introduce a case study of an organization of women working together to improve the conditions facing women in their community. In order to make this information practical and available to other women's groups interested in undertaking community planning from a women's perspective, the thesis will include a documentation of the opportunities and constraints faced by women in rural or resource-based areas of British Columbia.
CHAPTER 3

DESCRIPTION OF WOMEN'S ORGANIZED ACTION IN MERRITT, B.C.
A Case Study of the Nicola Valley Women in Action Society

3.0 Introduction

The case study presented in this chapter focuses on the Nicola Valley Women in Action Society (NVWIA), a non-profit women's organization based in Merritt, British Columbia. This organization began in 1991 as a means of planning for the needs of women and families in the community. The significance of the NVWIA is based on its approach - it is an example of a grass-roots, gender-based community planning strategy operating in a rural area. In order to describe this organization in its context, background information on the City of Merritt will be presented. Information on the community was gathered through a review of planning documents, community research, and government statistics relating to Merritt and the Nicola Valley.

Following the background information, the remainder of the chapter provides a description of the Nicola Valley Women in Action. This purpose of this description is to outline the relevant features of the organization that help to understand how women in Merritt organized themselves to take action in their community. Included in this description is information on the history of the organization, its purpose, type of organizational structure, membership, activities and accomplishments.

3.1 Background on the Community

3.1.1 Demographic Characteristics

Merritt is a small city in central British Columbia located along the Coquihalla Highway, approximately 100 kilometers south-east of Kamloops. The city, situated at the junction of
the Coldwater and Nicola Rivers, is part of the Thompson Nicola Regional District. The total population of Merritt in 1991 was 6,253 (Statistics Canada 1991, Cat. No. 95-384). The population percentage change between 1986 and 1991 was minuscule, increasing by 1.2%. It was noted in the 1991 Census that 50.2% of the population are female, 49.8% of the population are male; 41% of the total population over 15 years of age are married; and 14% of the census families in Merritt are lone-parent families. Of these lone parent families, 84% are lead by females.

The population of Merritt is composed of three major ethnic groups. The majority of the population are of British origin (around 50%) and a significant proportion of the population are of First Nations descent (approximately 20%). Almost 10% of the population report having Punjabi as their mother tongue, while even a greater proportion (approximately 30%) are of Indo-Canadian background (Statistics Canada 1991, Cat. No. 95-384). Other ethnic groups which represent less than 10% of the population are German, French, Dutch, Italian and Chinese.

3.1.2 Economy and Employment
The city was incorporated in 1911 when it was a major centre for coal mining in the province. Since then it has experienced a number of expansions and declines associated with the forestry and mining industries upon which its economy is largely dependent (Thompson-Nicola Regional District Economic Development Commission 1979). Merritt’s economy is primarily resource-based with little secondary manufacturing or diversification. According to a report written by the Nicola Valley Community Futures Association, the economic base of this region has changed little since the early 1900s (1990:28).

Employment opportunities are limited, and dependent on outside markets, making the local economy susceptible to varying market conditions of raw materials such as copper, lumber,
and agricultural products. In 1990, the major employers in the Region included corporate and privately-owned wood production companies, the provincial government, and the local school and hospital as demonstrated in Table 1.

TABLE 1
Major Employers in Merritt, 1990

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Employer</th>
<th>No. of Employees as of February, 1990 (includes ft/pt/occasional)</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Weyerhaeuser Canada Ltd.</td>
<td>215</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Provincial Government Services*</td>
<td>169</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Tolko Industries Ltd.</td>
<td>150</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>School District No. 1</td>
<td>314</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Emcon Services Inc.</td>
<td>130</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Nicola Valley General Hospital</td>
<td>120</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Aspen Planers Ltd.</td>
<td>85</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Ardew Wood Products Ltd.</td>
<td>60</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Douglas Lake Cattle Company</td>
<td>45</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Sanders Construction</td>
<td>40</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>


* Included in the total figure for provincial government services employees are those working for the Ministry of Highways, Ministry of Health, Ministry of Forests, Ministry of Social Services and Housing, Ministry of Regional and Economic Development, Ministry of the Environment, Ministry of Municipal Affairs, Recreation and Culture, Court Registry, Probation and Family Court Services, and the Government Agent.

Unemployment and underemployment in Merritt are high; what employment opportunities do exist appear to be in largely male-dominated industries. Seven out of the ten top employers in the region, including the four saw-mills, the provincial government, a wood production plant, a cattle company and a construction company, tend to hire a predominantly male-dominated staff (interview, Merritt Community Leader). Information on the number of females employed by each of these employers was not available.
Recent employment trends in the traditional sectors of Merritt's economy over the last decade are not promising. For example, developments in the forest products sector, rising costs and government quotas on allowable cuts have restricted employment growth in Merritt's four mills (Nicola Valley Community Futures 1990:29). Mining activity has declined somewhat over the last decade but remains a stabilizing influence on the overall economy. Agriculture continues to flourish and become more diversified, with a few new entrants (Nicola Valley Community Futures 1990:30).

3.1.3 Community Leadership
In the spring of 1994, Merritt's municipal council was made up of a female mayor and six council members, two of which were female. Many established and influential civic and community organizations exist which also play a role in community planning. These include the Chamber of Commerce, Economic Development Commission, Community Futures, Knights of Columbus, Kinsmen, Elks, and the Ranchers Association. A number of voluntary social service agencies exist in Merritt such as Merritt Legal Services, the Nicola Valley Women in Action Society, Merritt Youth Services, Goal Getters, Nicola Valley Health Care Society, Nicola Valley Family Therapy, Nicola Valley Family and Human Services, Conayt Friendship Society and a Healthy Communities Committee.

3.2 Community Planning and Development Issues in Merritt
Over the last decade, community planning and development initiatives in Merritt and the Nicola Valley have been undertaken by both professional and community-based (self-help) planners. A review of planning reports and community studies written in the last decade uncovered a number of economic, social and environmental issues affecting the community.

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1This section is based on the same information collected and co-authored by Lisa Griffith in a report prepared for the research project Getting On With The Job! in Merritt, B.C. for the SPARC - University of Victoria Social Development Research Program funded by National
Issues identified by institutional planning reports (such as Official Community Plans and consultants reports prepared on behalf of various government departments) include: the need for the promotion of economic opportunities in the region (1986); the need for a comprehensive land use and development policy for the City of Merritt (1987, 1993); the need for a strategic action plan for economic development in the City of Merritt (1988); recreational facility needs (1988); the need for management of natural resources such as forest and range resources (1988); the need for strategies to increase the supply of rental housing (1991); and a report outlining youth needs (1993). A list of reports included in this review are shown in Table 2.

Reports prepared on behalf of non-government or community-based agencies also uncovered significant social, economic and environmental concerns affecting Merritt. Among the concerns raised by these documents are: the prevalence of spousal abuse and violence and the demand for services to meet the needs of battered women (1988); the need for community participation in economic development (1990); the lack of child care facilities (1990); the needs of students, especially female students in the areas of housing, transportation and child care (1991); the need for services for women and families and the availability of appropriate service provision (1991); and the existence of general community issues such as alcohol abuse, racism and cross-cultural conflict, the lack of employment opportunities and the lack of public involvement in planning for healthy communities (1992). A list of reports included in this review are shown in Table 3.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Date</th>
<th>Publisher</th>
<th>Title</th>
<th>Focus</th>
<th>Gender Analysis*</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1986</td>
<td>Thompson-Nicola Regional District (Price Waterhouse Management Consultants)</td>
<td>Thompson-Nicola Regional District Regional Distribution Opportunities Study</td>
<td>Promotion of distribution opportunities in the region</td>
<td>not included</td>
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<tr>
<td>1987</td>
<td>City of Merritt</td>
<td>Official Community Plan</td>
<td>Municipal land use and development policy</td>
<td>not included</td>
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<tr>
<td>1988</td>
<td>Thompson-Nicola Regional District (Price Waterhouse Management Consultants)</td>
<td>The Thompson-Nicola Regional Economic Development Strategy (Merritt)</td>
<td>Strategic action plan for economic development</td>
<td>not included</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1988</td>
<td>Merritt Forest District &amp; Kamloops Forest and Land Region</td>
<td>Merritt Timber Supply Area Plan</td>
<td>Management of forest and range resources in the Merritt Timber Supply Area</td>
<td>not included</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1991</td>
<td>City of Merritt (Macquire and Rossworn Research Associates)</td>
<td>City of Merritt Rental Housing Strategy</td>
<td>Strategies to increase the supply of rental housing</td>
<td>not included</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1993</td>
<td>City of Merritt and the Full Gospel Tabernacle (Kurt Keppler)</td>
<td>Merritt Youth Centre Report</td>
<td>Need for a drop-in youth centre</td>
<td>not included</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1993</td>
<td>City of Merritt</td>
<td>Official Community Plan</td>
<td>Municipal land use and development policy</td>
<td>not included</td>
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</tbody>
</table>

* Gender Analysis refers to the disaggregation of findings or recommendations along gender lines.
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Date</th>
<th>Publisher</th>
<th>Title</th>
<th>Focus</th>
<th>Gender Analysis</th>
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</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1988</td>
<td>Coldwater Reserve</td>
<td>Report on Spousal Abuse</td>
<td>Needs of women and families who are victims of violence and abuse</td>
<td>included</td>
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<tr>
<td>1990</td>
<td>Nicola Valley Community</td>
<td>An Economic Development Strategy Plan for the</td>
<td>Community participation in economic development</td>
<td>not included</td>
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<td></td>
<td>Community Futures</td>
<td>Nicola Valley</td>
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<td></td>
<td>Futures Association</td>
<td>Needs of women and</td>
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<td>families who are</td>
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<td>victims of violence</td>
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<td></td>
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<td>and abuse</td>
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<td></td>
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<tr>
<td>1990</td>
<td>Nicola Valley Institute</td>
<td>The Childcare Needs Assessment</td>
<td>Need for licensed childcare facilities</td>
<td>included</td>
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<tr>
<td></td>
<td>of Technology (Sharpe</td>
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<td></td>
<td>and Lindley)</td>
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<td>1991</td>
<td>Cariboo College</td>
<td>Assessment of the community of Merritt</td>
<td>Outline of issues affected the broader community</td>
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<td></td>
<td>(Dempster, Butler and</td>
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<td>Peterson, students)</td>
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<td>1991</td>
<td>Nicola Valley Institute</td>
<td>Profile of the Nicola Valley Institute of</td>
<td>Issues affecting NVIT student body (particularly women)</td>
<td>included</td>
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<td></td>
<td>of Technology (Poynting</td>
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<td>1991</td>
<td>Nicola Valley Institute</td>
<td>The Nicola Valley Women's Community Needs</td>
<td>Needs of women and the availability of services to meet these needs</td>
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<td>1992</td>
<td>Healthy Communities</td>
<td>The Nicola Valley Healthy Communities Needs</td>
<td>Issues of concern to the general community</td>
<td>not included</td>
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<td>Committee (Jennifer T.</td>
<td>Assessment</td>
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*Gender Analysis* refers to the disaggregation of findings or recommendations along gender lines.
Both Institutional and community-based planning reports and research documents were reviewed for their inclusion of gender analysis, in other words, a disaggregation of findings or recommendations along gender lines, a mention of the differential impacts any one issue may have on men and women as well as any mention of the need for an understanding of the problems faced by women. The results of this review (also summarized in Tables 2 and 3 above) reveal a general lack of attention paid to 'gender' issues in planning among the findings and recommendations made by institutional planning reports (those written by professional planners and contract researchers). On the other hand, community-based planning processes appear to be more sensitive to gender issues; these documents addressed issues of particular relevance to women - issues such as violence and abuse, social service needs, the lack of day care, and processes for building healthy communities.

A closer examination of the text of planning reports summarized in Table 2 revealed that none of these eight reports include gender as variable in their analysis, or even mention the word "gender". The identification of planning issues such economic development, land use and development, social housing and youth needs are of interest to women as well as men; however, in the analysis of these reports, the particular impacts on women in the area are not discussed. Despite the value of institutional planning initiatives, they lack completeness in their analysis; the gaps in these reports demonstrate how the issue of 'gender' has been neglected or marginalized in most planning research and policy.

For example, the strategic plan for economic development prepared by the regional government (1986) develops an economic profile of the region and identifies potential areas of economic development. Tourism was identified as having the most potential for growth, the plan neglected to mention the gender implications of promoting seasonal and low-paying jobs in the tourism sector. As well, the plan only describes further opportunities for economic growth under the following sectors—distribution and warehousing, forestry and
forest product manufacturing, ranching, feedlot and slaughterhouse opportunities—all of which have been predominantly male-dominated industries. There is no mention of the needs of unemployed or underemployed females, the encouragement of family friendly work-places, nor any recommendation on how to promote women in non-traditional industries.

Further examples of the lack of attention to women's needs are apparent in the reports on recreational needs and rental housing. The report on recreational needs outlines the need for a multi-purpose recreational facility, but fails to mention the need for on-site day-care or children's or senior's programming which would greatly reduce the burden of women primarily responsible for child-care or elder care. The report on rental housing outlines the need to increase the supply of suitable multi-family rental housing due to a significant shortage especially among target groups (seniors, sole parent and working families), yet fails to stress that the majority of seniors and lone parents are female and are therefore the most disadvantaged when it comes to accessing housing.

However, a review of community-based research documents resulted in a notably different perspective on the needs of women and the community in general. Upon closer examination of the community-based documents, only a few of these reports did not include an account of the importance of gender as a variable in community research. An Economic Development Plan for the Nicola Valley was one report that failed to systematically analyze its findings in relation to women's needs, nevertheless, it did mention the need for wider participation in economic development at the local level.

The Nicola Valley Healthy Communities Project gave residents the opportunity to discuss issues of importance to their community livability. A survey conducted by the Healthy Communities Committee (Lisle 1992) identified a number of stressors and resources in the
area, many of particular significance to women including: a rising teenage pregnancy rate; a
rising number of stillborn babies, suicides and alcoholism; a fluctuating unemployment rate
due to the resource based economy; lack of housing and day-care; and the lack of a year
round recreational facility.

All the remaining community-based reports were sensitive to women’s needs, both through
the identification of women-centered issues and their choices of research methodology. For
example, research conducted in 1988 focused on spousal assault and reported an urgent need
for a safe place for women and their children. As a result of this report, a Transition House
was opened on the Coldwater Reserve in November 1991.

One particular report, The Nicola Valley Women’s Community Needs Assessment, is of
particular importance to this study. The Nicola Valley Women’s Community Needs
Assessment was one of the initial projects undertaken by the Nicola Valley Women in
Action (NVWIA). The report’s findings concluded "that women's needs are being only
partially met, and that much more could be done" (Lisle 1991:3). The report is significant
because it represented the first comprehensive attempt to raise awareness of the need for
'gender-sensitive planning' in Merritt. It established the need for an understanding of the
problems faced by women in the community. It brought to the fore issues that up until this
point in Merritt’s history had not been mentioned in the public arena. In order to trace the
series of events that led to the creation of this landmark planning document, it is necessary
to introduce the organization responsible for its publication.

3.3 Introduction to the Nicola Valley Women in Action Society
The NVWIA began in the fall of 1991 when a group of local women came together to
analyze, prioritize, and plan for the needs of women and families in the valley. The
beginnings of the organization can be traced to the spring of 1991 when two female service
providers operating in Merritt were approached by the Regional Director of the Ministry of Women's Programs and the Minister Responsible for Families (Ann Davis). The government agent contacted the two women to discuss the possibility of exploring the need for and existence of services for women in the Nicola Valley. Following this meeting, the two women decided to organize a public forum. Community members, including representatives from the Native and Indo-Canadian communities, were invited to attend the forum in order to discuss women's needs, the lack of services to meet their needs, and possible solutions.

A large group of women, including the Mayor (Hon. Clara Noorgard), the Regional Director of the Ministry of Women's Programs and the Minister Responsible for Families (Ann Davis), local agency representatives, caregivers, students, and homemakers, gathered for the forum held in September 1991. Ann Davis addressed the group. One of the women in attendance described the format of this forum in this way:

We got a group of people together, and we said "What's missing in the Valley for women?". We filled two blackboards with all the things that were missing. Then we decided to set up a non-profit society to do a needs assessment ...and that's where we began.

After brainstorming a vast list of needs (over one hundred), the women decided to form an interim committee "to coordinate the application for non-profit society status and to seek funding to hire a co-ordinator to do an in-depth Needs Assessment of the community" (Nicola Valley Women in Action - Information Package 1994). The members held a vote and decided to name their non-profit organization the Nicola Valley Women In Action Society. Less than a year later, the NVWIA incorporated as a non-profit society under the B.C. Society Act (June 11, 1992). In the meantime, the interim committee had approached the Women's Grants Program of the Ministry of Women's Programs and the Minister Responsible for Families for funding to hire a researcher to conduct the Needs Assessment (for more information on the findings of the Needs Assessment, see section 3.7 below).
3.4 Purpose of the Nicola Valley Women in Action Society

As part of their application for non-profit status, the NVWIA prepared a constitution to guide operation of their organization. According to the constitution written in 1991 the purpose of the Society was:

a) To promote an awareness of women's issues and needs in the Nicola Valley;
b) To provide support services for the women and families of the Nicola Valley;
c) To conduct research and studies regarding women's and family issues in the Nicola Valley.

During the interviews, members of the organization were asked to comment on the original purpose and principles driving the organization. It became clear that members wholeheartedly believed that a larger purpose of their work was to effect changes that would improve the welfare of the entire community, not just female residents. Some respondents stressed the purpose of the organization in terms of improving the lives of individual women; others felt the purpose of the organization was to improve the well-being of families and the community at large. Overall, there appeared to be a general consensus among members that by supporting women's needs, they were able to affect the well-being of women, families, and the community.

Respondents had difficulty distinguishing between the organization's purpose and the principles or beliefs underlying this purpose. At the time the interviews took place, few respondents were able to clearly articulate the principles driving the NVWIA, in fact, it became evident that there had not been any group discussion or consensus regarding the common underlying beliefs of the Society's members. Interestingly, six months following the interviews (in November 1994), the NVWIA presented a newly written mission statement and statement of philosophy for circulation (included below).
MISSION STATEMENT FOR THE NICOLA VALLEY WOMEN IN ACTION

Nicola Valley Women in Action is a voluntary society made up of individuals who are concerned about the conditions facing women in our communities. We seek to initiate and promote measures that will bring about a healthy social, economic, emotional, and physical environment for women in society. The organization facilitates these measures through direct service, public education and reform advocacy.

STATEMENT OF PHILOSOPHY FOR THE NICOLA VALLEY WOMEN IN ACTION

WE BELIEVE THAT:

1. Social Justice is a "fair distribution of benefits and burdens in society".

2. Social justice cannot be realized in a society that discriminates on the basis of gender.

3. There continue to be incidence of systemic and individual discrimination on the basis of gender.

4. Women do not have equal access to opportunities and benefits because of the fact that they are women. Further, women carry a disproportionate burden in society because they are women.

5. No person can ever be free in a society in which the rights and potential of women are constrained.

6. All people have the right to live in a safe and caring community and the responsibility to speak out when this right is infringed.

7. By encouraging active participation in creating solutions to social injustices affecting women, social change is possible that will result in a better society for all people.

These revisions signify changes that the organization is experiencing as it reflects upon its purpose and role in the community. By clearly articulating the values upon which their organization was created, the purpose of the organization appears to be evolving from a helping or support role to one of direct social action.

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3.5 Organizational Structure of the Nicola Valley Women in Action Society

The members of the NVWIA chose the traditional board structure typically used by non-profit societies to guide the operation and decision-making of their organization. A set of by-laws was created which outlined the role of the Society's membership, board of directors, executive, vice-president, treasurer, secretary and committees as well as the procedure for general meetings, elections, financial operations and amendments to the constitution.³

Participants informed me that decision-making within this formal structure is largely informal. Every attempt is made to work toward consensus. At the time the interviews were conducted (May 1994), the president had recently moved from the community, and the organization was without a replacement. In the absence of a president, one woman was designated to act as a chair. Meetings were held bi-monthly and were attended by a core group of committed women. During meetings all members were encouraged to add to the agenda and participate.

3.6 Membership in the Nicola Valley Women in Action Society

Over the years, membership in the NVWIA has varied from over thirty active members to its current working group of approximately fifteen to twenty women. According to its members, the NVWIA represents all women and families in the Nicola Valley.

Membership in the organization bears a minimal charge ($5.00/year) and is open to all residents of the community, regardless of differences in sex, educational background, cultural or ethnic background, social status etc. Members are recruited by word of mouth and an information package⁴ and the organization is publicized through sponsored events, brochures and pamphlets and local media coverage.

³ See Appendix 4.
⁴ See Appendix 4.
It was my observation that a majority of the members were professional women. Very few women were not of European descent, middle-class and formally educated and trained or working in a professional capacity in the community. Two of the members interviewed were aboriginals, one newer member was a white unemployed single parent. The one Indo-Canadian member was unavailable at the time of the study.

The involvement of mostly professional women, rather than those women the organization is attempting to serve is noteworthy. This observation fits with the findings of Daniels (1988) who found that a majority of women with "careers" in the voluntary sector are white, middle to upper class and well-educated. It is important to note that the non-participation of minority women or recipients of community services is an issue of which the members are cognizant, and are exploring further. The women were aware that many barriers exist in Merritt that hinder the participation of certain women in their organization. These barriers are presented in more detail in Chapter Four.

3.7 Activities and Accomplishments of the Nicola Valley Women in Action Society

Over the years the NVWIA have undertaken several initiatives in their efforts to support the needs of women and families in the community. The main activities and accomplishments are described below.

3.7.1 The Nicola Valley Women's Community Needs Assessment

As mentioned earlier, one of the first formal activities undertaken by the NVWIA was a Needs Assessment. Funding was obtained from the Women's Grants Program of the Ministry of Women's Programs and the Minister Responsible for Families in September 1991, and a research consultant was hired to carry out the study. The official purpose of the research was to "discover what services presently existed for women in the Nicola Valley, the scope
of such services and gaps perceived by the service providers and clients" (Armstrong, 1991: 3). The Needs Assessment was completed in November 1991.

Information for the Needs Assessment was gathered through two questionnaires - the first targeted service providers to find out the kinds of services directed at women's needs, and the second was distributed to different women in the Nicola Valley to assess how women themselves perceived the services that did exist. The study noted the difficulty both service providers and women had faced in the past providing and accessing appropriate aid (Armstrong 1991).

The results of the two surveys revealed significant service gaps, particularly in the areas of housing, day-care, counseling, domestic violence, sexual assault, victim's assistance, education and other women's issues (Armstrong 1991). Table 4 shows a partial list of the study's findings regarding concerns rated "very important" by the women of the Nicola Valley.

**TABLE 4**  
Top Twelve Issues Rated Very Important to Women in the Nicola Valley

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Issues</th>
<th>Rate</th>
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<tr>
<td>Child Abuse, Housing</td>
<td>1</td>
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<tr>
<td>Day-care, Child Care</td>
<td>2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Sexual Abuse</td>
<td>3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Drugs and Alcohol</td>
<td>4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Sexual Assault, Violence Against Women, Education Needs</td>
<td>5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Battering</td>
<td>6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Family and Personal Counseling</td>
<td>7</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Information Regarding Available Services</td>
<td>8</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Teen Pregnancy</td>
<td>9</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Job Training</td>
<td>10</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Health</td>
<td>11</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Human Rights</td>
<td>12</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Among the top five concerns were child abuse, housing, child care, sexual abuse, drugs and alcohol, sexual assault, violence against women, and education needs. Other findings recorded in The Nicola Valley Women's Community Needs Assessment suggested that women felt there was a potential leadership role of municipal government in building awareness and developing new services to meet the needs of women in the community. The report quoted one research participant as remarking, "There should be some focus on the human situation rather than just economic development" (Anderson 1991:13). In the opinion of those surveyed, the City Council of Merritt had not adequately responded to this role.

As well, several interviewees expressed concern that other planning officials, including representatives of the Federal and Provincial Government, were not doing enough and could take on greater responsibility for local problems. As a result of the findings, a number of general recommendations were generated. A list of these recommendations is included in Table 5.
TABLE 5
Recommendations Made by the
Nicola Valley Women's Community Needs Assessment

1. That funding be sought and a project undertaken to create a comprehensive Community Services Directory.

2. That more effort be directed toward inter-agency communication/ cooperation.

3. That organizations, agencies and service providers make a strong effort to raise their own awareness, and that of their employees on women's issues and sponsorship of community education programs.

4. Re-establishment of the Victim’s Assistance program.

5. Provision of assistance or liaison from N.V.I.T. with community groups to provide information to students in areas of housing, day-care, counseling, support, health.

6. Creation of an inter-agency committee to address day-care.

7. Cooperative initiation of a study to look at the lack of suitable and affordable housing.

8. Further planning to be carried out by the community to meet the needs identified by this study.
3.7.2 Establishment of a Family Centre

One finding that was repeatedly mentioned in the Needs Assessment was the need for a resource centre—a non-threatening place for women to get information, referrals, and assistance. In order to provide such an amenity to the community, the NVWIA lobbied for funding. Money was received from the Ministry of Women's Programs and the Minister Responsible for Families, and after sharing an office with another non-profit organization for a short time, a permanent resource centre was opened downtown on November 14, 1992. The Family Centre was to be a "safe place for women to come to discuss issues and plan action-based activities on changing the community." A co-ordinator was hired to provide information, make referrals and generally be a resource person on issues of concern to women.

It should be noted that the founding members of the NVWIA deliberately chose to call their centre a "Family Centre", rather than a "Women's Centre". These women wanted to attract a wide variety of users and felt that by labeling their facility a Women's Centre "it may have created a bit of a problem to reach some members of the community, and those are the ones that we really want to reach." It was also their opinion that the Centre may not have gained as much legitimacy had they not made that distinction. The reluctance of the founding members to associate the NVWIA with the women's movement will be further explored in chapter four.

For over a year and a half, the family centre was open regular hours. In May 1994, the regular operation of the family centre ceased due to a lack of funding for the staff person and limitations on the members' volunteer time and energy. The facility is now used as office and meeting space for the Society and the programs it supports.
3.7.3 Direct Service Provision

Once the group completed its Needs Assessment, it quickly moved from assessment to intervention in terms of implementing direct services. With assistance from the local detachment of the R.C.M.P., the NVWIA re-established the Victim's Support Services program in October 1992. Victim's Services now serves the communities of Merritt and Logan Lake with the aid of a co-ordinator and more than a dozen volunteers. The program gives priority to victims of wife battering, sexual assault (children and adults), physical assaults and threats, and serves an average caseload of 65 cases per month (Co-ordinator's Report 1994).

In conjunction with another community-based group (the Nicola Valley Human and Community Services), and funding from federal and provincial government ministries (the Attorney General, Ministry of Social Services and the Ministry of Women's Programs and the Minister Responsible for Families), the NVWIA opened a family counseling centre, Nicola Valley Family Therapy, which employs two full-time counselors and an office administrator. Nicola Valley Therapy opened in the Spring of 1993 and presently offers free counseling services to all family members in need. Response to the counseling service has been very positive, and one woman told me that "from the day it opened has been overwhelmed with demand".

The organization also sponsored the development of the Assaultive Men's Treatment Program, a support group for abusive husbands and partners. This program, which began in the spring of 1993, provides a series of group and individual treatment sessions for court ordered and voluntary men who are violent within the family. A major focus of the program centres on relapse prevention, victim empathy, and the development of problem-solving skills. The program runs with the aid of a part-time facilitator and co-therapist.
A part-time administrator was hired in September 1994 to facilitate the operation of all the various programs described above.

3.7.4 Community Development and Education

Once the above services were implemented, the NVWIA turned its attention to community development and education in the area of cross cultural communication. The group organized a preliminary work-shop on racism and cross-cultural conflict to address issues raised by their research and other community initiatives (the Healthy Communities Research Project). In June 1993, the NVWIA and Merritt Legal Services Society co-sponsored a Cross-Cultural Conflict Resolution Workshop, for which they invited key leaders in the community to gather and consider issues of cross-cultural conflict resolution and community readiness for development.

In follow-up to this session the two groups coordinated three sets of three day community-wide workshops entitled "Building Community through Cross-Cultural Awareness and Communication" held in December 1994. Funding for the sessions was provided by several sources including Heritage Canada, B.C. Multiculturalism, the Legal Services Society of British Columbia, and the City of Merritt. Nearly one hundred residents of the community attended these free sessions.

3.7.5 General Advocacy and Networking

Over the years, the NVWIA has continued to lobby the local government for affordable housing and recreational alternatives, child care services, especially on-site day-care for families taking part in educational programming, and ESL classes for minority women. They have supported existing services in the community by sponsoring counseling for counselors workshops, by networking with other social service agencies to remove barriers
and diversify existing programs, by soliciting support for the Transition House, and by acknowledging the needs and goals of the Aboriginal community.

3.8 Conclusion

The chapter began with a brief profile of Merritt as background information on the formation of the Nicola Valley Women in Action. A description of the organization included information gathered through interviews and a review of organizational material on the origins, purpose, organizational structure, membership and activities undertaken by the NVWIA. By focusing on what members of the NVWIA do from "outside" the mainstream processes of community planning and decision-making, this section attempts to uncover how women have created a planning structure that is relevant to their needs. The next chapter will describe how women perceive their involvement in the NVWIA.
CHAPTER 4

THE EXPERIENCES OF WOMEN INVOLVED IN
THE NICOLA VALLEY WOMEN IN ACTION

4.0 Introduction

This chapter provides insight into women's experiences of involvement in a women's planning organization. This section describes the women's personal reflections of why they became involved in the NVWIA and their opinion of where the organization fits into the processes of community planning (its role in the community). Also included in this chapter is a description of the members' perspectives of the influence and value of feminism on the development of the NVWIA, the kinds of barriers present in Merritt, and the response their activities has elicited from various sectors in the community. Information for this chapter was gathered through personal interviews conducted with members of the NVWIA.

4.1 Members' Motivation for Involvement

Each research participant was asked to comment on her reasons for becoming involved. There appeared to be a notable difference between the responses given by members who had been involved from the inception of the organization through its first two years of operation (founding members), and members who had only recently joined the organization (newer members). Their responses have been summarized below according to whether the women were founding or newer members.

4.1.1 Founding Members

A majority of the founding members interviewed had been service providers or students of social work at the time the organization began (fall 1991). Their knowledge of the situation facing women in crisis had primarily motivated them to create and actively join the NVWIA.
According to one source, the need to start addressing women's issues at that time was "urgent". It was her feeling that by "working together women may resolve some of the issues and better our community and our families." One of the women responsible for organizing the initial forum described her motivation as the desire to "put something together" for the women of the Nicola Valley, something "to enhance their living, primarily in the areas of counseling, increased awareness of themselves so they could feel more independent, rather than being dependent on their family or friends or spouse." She felt that the provision of appropriate social services would allow women, such as herself, to support and empower others to "become more active in the community as opposed to being more passive."

Another founding member enrolled in the Social Work Program at the Nicola Valley Institute of Technology (NVIT) became aware of the situation facing women in her community through her involvement in a school research project. The research in question focused on the needs of female students attending NVIT. She informed me that prior to this she was not aware of the range of issues affecting female community members, in fact, she stated that she "didn't have a clue before then, it was a real eye-opener." This research personally motivated her to become involved with the NVWIA as a means of addressing the need for services, housing alternatives, and child care services outlined .

4.1.2 Newer Members

More than half of the respondents interviewed were women who had become actively involved with the NVWIA after its first two years of existence. Their motivation for involvement differs from that of the founding members. Newer members were motivated both by their desire to be involved with a women's organization, and by their belief that the NVWIA was able to effect change in the community.
The first factor that motivated newer members to become involved was the fact that the NVWIA was indeed a group of 'women in action' rather than a mixed group of concerned citizens. According to one newer member, she became involved in the NVWIA because she wanted to gain some experience in group dynamics and preferred to be involved exclusively with women. Another woman who had recently moved to Merritt told me she had been interested in joining a women's group for some time, and was impressed to discover the existence of a women's group like the NVWIA. Similarly, another newcomer to the community was motivated to become involved with the NVWIA as a means of carrying forth her commitment to the women's movement.

The second factor that motivated newer members was the level of respect and influence that the organization had attained since its inception. As outlined in Chapter Three, the NVWIA has successfully initiated a number of significant projects in the community. One woman, working in the Human Services Field, came across the organization through work-related enquiries, learned more about what the group had accomplished, and was so impressed by its reputation that she decided to become a member herself. Another member was very explicit about her reasons for joining the NVWIA: she was attracted by the fact that most members were professional women with experience in the social services area, and that the organization had attained a respectable position of influence in the community. Still another woman who had been following the activities of the NVWIA via the local media decided to become involved because she was also "interested and inspired by the work this particular organization had accomplished over the past three years."

4.2 The Influence and Value of a Feminist Approach

To gain a sense of the members' perceptions of the influence and value of a feminist approach to community organizing, each woman was asked to comment on whether the NVWIA was a feminist organization and how this has affected its ability to influence action in their
The majority of women I spoke to believed that the organization was influenced by feminist principles to some degree. However, once again I found differences between the founding and newer members for openly labeling their organization as 'feminist'.

4.2.1 Founding Members

In general, founding members were hesitant to describe their Society as a feminist organization. For example, one founding member remarked "We're not radical, we're not burning our bras, we're not that kind of group. What we are is a bunch of women who are concerned about our standard of living and we want to improve it." This sentiment was echoed by another founding member who told me "when it comes down to the nitty-gritty we all believe in basic feminist rights, but we are not man-haters or male-bashers." Both of these women appear to negatively associate 'feminism' with the actions of stereotypical 'radical activists.' This data supports the findings of other researchers who found women to be supportive of the ideals of the women's movement yet perceive anything labeled as feminist or radical as negative (Kamen 1991).

According to one of the founding members, the reluctance of the founding members to embrace "feminism", especially in an outright manner, represented a conscious strategy to be as inclusive as possible. She commented:

At one point in time...I think we could have geared in [a feminist] direction but I think we always looked at our overall objective as the involvement of other women, the community itself and the other communities that surround the Nicola Valley. I think we were always careful at the beginning to make sure that we involved everybody so that we weren't "labeled". I think that was very cautious on our part.

4.2.2 Newer Members

In contrast to the founding members, newer members appeared more willing to associate their organization with the feminist movement. Several newer members strongly affirmed their
identity as a feminist-informed women's group, offering responses such as: "yes, we are coming from a feminist perspective. This has helped everyone understand the issues"; and "in my opinion, we are a feminist organization. We are the peace-makers, we are the ones that get the grass-roots movements going". Indeed, several newer members felt that the reluctance of their founding members to embrace feminism has weakened the potential of the NVWIA to influence action and enhance community well-being. When asked about the influence of feminist principles on the NVWIA and its potential to promote social change, one woman answered:

[The NVWIA] does not identify itself that way, but I do believe that [feminist principles] are exactly what it is based on. The organization very clearly articulates the need to address social and economic and emotional needs of women and to encourage participation of women in the community, and to further the well-being of women and thereby, promote the well-being of all society - and those to me are feminist principles. However, my personal feelings are that it could have a much stronger influence if the group clearly identified itself as being feminist-based.

She felt that being identified as a feminist group would allow the group to create a public forum for political discussion aimed at identifying and addressing the oppression of women. In her words, "it is certainly significant to address issues such as violence against women, but at some point you need a political analysis, and that is where a feminist approach would help provide that [kind of] analysis."

Another newer member agreed that although the organization has been influenced by feminist thought, their reluctance to identify with the movement has limited their ability to effect change in the community. She informed me that

Since we are not perceived as strong feminists, we are seen as 'just another' women's organization that grudgingly gained respect from the community.
Similarly, another newer member described a sense of disappointment regarding the reluctance of the organization to engage in more overtly (publicly) feminist activism. When asked if the NVWIA was a feminist organization, she told me that, "I wish it was, but I don't think it is."

She went on to suggest that the organization's ability to influence social action has been restricted due to its present 'service' or philanthropic focus which fails to support other relevant and equally important issues relating to women. She confided that

This may be unfair, but I think that some of the [original] group has perceived itself in a 'helping' role, sort of a 'nurturing' role. This is a positive thing, but in a negative way it reaffirms that we don't hold the power, [that] we are just doing things for the patriarchal society in which we live.

It was her opinion that the group's reluctance to embrace feminism stems from "a lot of the backlash kind of thing that is happening in society." She told me that many women in the NVWIA hold a negative connotation of the term 'feminism' rather than a positive one, and "that some of them believe the myth that radical feminists have done more to harm us than to help us." It was her impression that the reason the NVWIA was not initially portrayed as a feminist organization is due to the belief that "society doesn't like, what the [founding members] would refer to as, 'aggressive women', so they do not want to be seen as 'aggressive' as this would turn others off."

She felt a more pro-active or political response would assist the group "in making the City realize that issues such as violence against women, sexual abuse, poverty, adequate housing are real, very real issues that should not be swept under the carpet." She felt that one way the organization could take a more active role would be to have representatives of their organization regularly attend public meetings "especially when council is addressing issues that women are particularly concerned about, and follow up with letters or petitions if there was an issue we wanted to work towards or help define". In other words she was openly
advocating that their group take on a more actively political role, as lobbyist or watch-dog, not only raising awareness but also ensuring that action is implemented at the end of the day. She commented that she was not sure where the actions undertaken by the NVWIA fit into the larger processes of social change, but she did feel that they should "try to influence policy and decision-making at the municipal level."

4.3 Members' Perceptions of the Barriers facing Women in Merritt

Each woman was asked to comment on the existence of barriers in Merritt, obstacles that limit a woman's opportunity to participate in their community. Although responses varied, all respondents agreed that barriers did exist in Merritt. The responses have been summarized under four different themes identified from the interviews.

4.3.1 Lack of Services

Women identified the lack of services common to most rural or resource-based areas, in particular the lack of housing, child care, employment, education, access to information, access to counseling and opportunity, as a significant barrier to women's involvement in Merritt. For instance, the lack of support services for women was noted as a key barrier to women's participation. Child care facilities, services for battered women, a woman's resource centre, family counseling, and safe houses did not exist in the area until the early 1990s. "The lack of year round day-care services" was revealed by several women as another typical barrier faced by women in this community. A limited number of day-care spaces are now available during the school year, but not during the summer months, making it difficult for women with year-round employment. The availability of affordable housing remains a problem in this community despite repeated studies and reports to raise awareness of the need.

Poverty was identified as another barrier to women's meaningful involvement in community affairs. One participant commented that the lack of employment affects the whole community,
but particularly women since "what work there is, is men's work." This was supported by another woman who told me that, "there is a huge proportion of women in the Nicola Valley who are unemployed, underemployed, not very well educated, and who have not really had opportunities available to them. It should be noted that this supports the findings of other researchers who have identified that the socio-economic conditions of rural or resource-based communities hinder the potential of women to lead full and active lives (Wall 1993).

4.3.2 Prevalence of Violence and Abuse

The members informed me that physical abuse and violence toward women in Merritt is prevalent. One woman told me, "One of the things that struck me quite significantly when I first moved here was the level of violence and the outward aggression. It is very noticeable, it is not hidden." I was also told:

"There is a tremendous amount of violence in this community, and that always has an impact on women. I subscribe to the thought that women who have been abused and victimized find it very difficult to function in mainstream society, they have low self-esteem, a lot of insecurities, and often have been physically prevented from being an active part of the community.

Respondents felt that the threat and reality of violence and abuse (physical, emotional, verbal) and the implications of dysfunctional behaviour among family members (alcoholism, drug addiction, etc.) acts as an immense barrier to women's personal safety and meaningful involvement in community life in Merritt.

4.3.3 Ethno-Cultural Barriers

Many respondents mentioned the existence of ethno-cultural difference as a barrier facing women in Merritt. Members felt that the strict division of Merritt's population along three diverse cultural lines, and the existence of racial discrimination and cross-cultural conflict were barriers to the involvement of minority women. Respondents felt that women of Native and
Indo-Canadian ancestry were especially disadvantaged given certain male-biased aspects of their culture, and the oppression of women by male family members. There was a recognition among one respondent that minority women may be prevented from participating in organized action due to cultural norms. Another woman spoke of the problems faced by minority women who are discouraged from speaking out or seeking help outside the extended family. According to her, diverse cultural and language differences can silence Indo-Canadian women. At the same time, "language is a barrier, those women with ESL are prevented from becoming as involved [as non-minority women]."

4.3.4 Limited Support for Feminist Activism

Another barrier to women's involvement in Merritt is the lack of support for feminist activism among both family members and the women themselves. I was informed that gender expectations based on the presupposed and desired notion that a "woman's place is in the home" proliferate in Merritt. Namely, "Merritt has a long standing tradition of being quite red-necked [traditional] and quite male-dominated." One woman informed me that there is a perception among some males in the community that if their wives go to too many meetings, they are shirking other responsibilities. She identified one barrier as "the guilt of becoming too involved. There is this feeling that going to meetings is selfish and somewhat frivolous."

One woman told me her husband believed she "had every opportunity as he did to go to meetings but I didn't because it was assumed that I would take care of the three kids." Another woman commented that due to a predominantly sexist attitude in Merritt, "being a women is a barrier. You are not taken seriously in jobs, education or politics."

Anti-feminist attitudes are not restricted to men only. Another barrier to women's involvement, especially women's collective action, is the reluctance of many women to become involved in an organization with a feminist cause. Association with anything feminist is risky, it may be seen as too progressive, too exclusive, too threatening.
4.4 Members' Perceptions of their Role in the Community

The role of the NVWIA, according to its members, is to address and overcome barriers that limit women from successfully participating in their community. The following section will document the ways in which the members of the Nicola Valley Women in Action felt they have attempted to address the many barriers as described above.

4.4.1 Raising Awareness of Women's Issues

One respondent felt the NVWIA has been instrumental in addressing the barriers faced by women living in a small, resource-based community by actively organizing to raise the awareness of women's needs and by pushing the community to take ownership of these issues. The Needs Assessment drew attention to women's needs in general and pointed out that women in rural areas faced many obstacles that could no longer go unnoticed. The NVWIA have also addressed financial barriers by offering community education, counseling services and programs free of charge.

Another respondent felt the NVWIA has been instrumental in raising the awareness of women's issues through community education. One example is the approach taken by the organization to raise awareness of the issue of family violence in their community and of the prevalence and severity of large-scale violence against women. On December 6 1994, the Society organized a silent candlelight march in commemoration of the fourteen women killed in the Montreal Massacre and all women who have suffered from violence. The women posted notices around the community condemning violence as a "chosen response" and urging change, both in society's tolerance levels of violence, and in the individual batter's choice of violence as a means of coping with a given situation.
4.4.2 Providing Services and Support for Victims of Abuse

Members of the Nicola Valley Women in Action Society believe they are directly addressing the needs of women and families in abusive situations through their sponsorship of several programs including Nicola Valley Family Therapy, Victim Support Services and the Assaultive Men's Program. In the words of one woman:

_In terms of some of the programs we continue to provide in the community - such as Nicola Valley Family Therapy which works specifically with women who are being abused, or were abused previously as adults or children, and Victim's Services which most often services women and children - we are providing some real programs that start to open up opportunities for change in the community - programs that empower women._" 

Specifically, one woman felt the organization has directly responded to the diversity of barriers faced by battered women "by providing all those kinds of services so women can build self-confidence, gain inspiration, and move forward."

4.4.3 Addressing the Needs of Ethnocultural Minorities

Members of the NVWIA feel they have made a notable attempt to address the needs of minority women. In the fall of 1991, the NVWIA were responsible for organizing classes for those with English-as-a-Second Language (ESL). When the classes were not well-attended, they recognized that the barriers facing minority women were of a deeper level, and moved towards addressing the gaps that may be isolating Indo-Canadian Women. The women organized a series of workshops to look at the barriers to cross-cultural communication. Although the workshops did not focus specifically on the issues faced by minority women, female Indo-Canadian high school students and Native elders were encouraged to speak openly and at length about their own personal experiences of racism and cross-cultural conflict.
The words of these women provided a moving and sensitive testimony of the damaging influences of racist attitudes. The format of the workshop provided a public forum in which marginalized women, whose voices may not have been heard otherwise, were allowed the opportunity to speak to community leaders. Although racism is an on-going societal problem, the action taken by the NVWIA offered a starting point for wider public dialogue and problem-solving in this community. As one woman told me

*With the issue of racism, it had a lot to do with people [finally] addressing that we may have a problem, or let's look at it, if we do have a problem, that was a real eye-opener for all of us!*

**4.4.4 Confronting Anti-feminist Attitudes**

Raising awareness of women's issues and the situation of women has been the starting point for most of the action taken by the NVWIA, yet most members felt that their work is only beginning to address the barriers presented by anti-feminist/chauvinistic attitudes. Although one woman humorously told me "*there are a few of us that don't lay down and roll over*"; another women felt there was still a long way to go to address anti-feminist attitudes in her community.

**4.5 The Response from the Community**

This section will describe the women's perceptions of how different sectors of the population have responded to the NVWIA. According to the members the community has responded to their organization in one of three ways. The first general response is one of indifference—referring to those residents in Merritt who have neither heard of the organization nor are aware of its efforts. The second general response is one of respect and appreciation—referring to these residents who genuinely value the actions and initiatives undertaken by the NVWIA to enhance the level of community well-being. The third general response is one of resistance to
reluctant acceptance—typically held by males who do not consider the actions taken by women as serious.

4.5.1 The Response from Women Outside of the Organization

Overall, members felt that the NVWIA has experienced a mixed response from women in the community. A recent member of the organization strongly felt that women in Merritt hold the NVWIA in a positive regard, especially those who have benefited from the initiatives made by the organization. It was her impression that certain women have been "affected on a very personal level" and are appreciative of the opportunities they now have to make significant changes in their lives via the support services sponsored by the NVWIA. On the other hand, a few respondents sensed that although many women are grateful for the services sponsored by the organization, they may not be openly aware of "who the Nicola Valley Women in Action is or what they do."

Other respondents commented that many women in the community, who are neither members of the organization nor service users, are supportive of the NVWIA and its goals, but have a tendency to not be involved with the organization. One woman felt this was "because they are afraid they are going to get stuck with a job, but as long as they don't have to be directly involved their response is good." Along the same lines, one woman informed me that women outside the organization "think it's great but don't personally have the time to get involved." Only one woman felt that there was a possibility that the NVWIA has been perceived by some women in the community as an elitist organization.

4.5.2 The Response from Men in the Community

The respondents perceived that men in the community were typically less supportive and at times openly resistant to their organization. One member told me that they "are not laughed
Yet another felt there is still an assumption among some of the men in the community that if the women get "out of hand" they can be "told to go home". She continued:

It's almost as if they are under the assumption that they have to give us permission, and I really don't think that we need anybody's permission because women are a very active force in the community whether or not men want to approve of it or not!

One woman felt that because the NVWIA has been very effective in achieving its goals and objectives, this may have threatened the men's community a bit. She went on to say that "now that the organization is no longer new, 'not as high profile', it has gained recognition. The fact that we are women does not appear to be as much of an issue." One woman told me that the organization was originally perceived as "just another women's thing". Another felt that there were still men in the community "that just perceive any women's group as 'a bunch of hen's cackling together'." One woman commented that she found "support for what we do as a women's group within women's circles is very good, but as soon as we get in to the circle with men, there is bare tolerance." She continued to tell me:

Whereas the power base may be white male, as far as sitting on the boards and the chairs as a general rule, I still think that most of the changes, most of the positive changes that have happened in our society, have happened because women have campaigned and because of the women's movement.

Another felt that in the beginning there was "some animosity from the [men's] community, that by being a women's organization, it was [perceived as] being discriminatory to all of those who are not women." One native woman told me she felt a definite resistance among men in her community to "empowered women." She told me that "in some instances men were very supportive, but then they would put the brakes on...the native men definitely resist the involvement of women." Further,
Speaking from a First Nations point of view, it has always been the men who have had the power, and over the last few years woman are finally finding their feet, and are running for council on their bands and bidding for some of the positions that have never been held by women. It is very threatening for the menfolk.

4.5.3 The Response from City Council

The majority of the respondents felt that the NVWIA has not been dismissed by the institutional structures of community planning (City Council); in fact, their work has been publicly hailed by the Mayor as "important and effective." One woman declared, "the City senses that we are capable, competent and resourceful; certainly our name comes up when they need a non-profit Society to administer a program." Another respondent felt the City's response to the organization has been very supportive. In support of her opinion, she declared "the City has become officially involved in our Cultural Awareness workshops." In addition, the City of Merritt recently invited a representative of the NVWIA to speak at a 1994 conference sponsored by the B.C. Union of Municipalities on the work their organization has spearheaded in the area of racism. This was seen by one woman as evidence of the City's "official recognition."

Yet on a different level, an attitudinal level, a former Co-ordinator, who has had direct interaction with City Council, suggested that the response from male City Councillors has ranged from "subtle condescension to blatant disregard." She told me,

The mayor has been very supportive, but the City Council, as a general rule, tends to treat me as that little woman from that women's organization - I am not taken seriously at council meetings, I am just kind of blown off.

It was her impression that often male City Council members were simply being "polite" as opposed to being receptive and supportive of their organization. It was her observation that:
We do a lot better when we are not treated as a women's group which is very unfortunate. The thing that I find that we still struggle against is the white power based idea of 'pecking order', where we fit in and what's acceptable.

4.5.4 The Response from Other Social Service Agencies

The response from different social services in the community has been both supportive and respectful. It was one woman's opinion that the NVWIA is a model social service agency to which other agencies "continue to aspire." One woman attributed their positive response from other service providers due to the fact that "the group does more than sit around and talk." Similarly, another woman reflected, "other organizations view us quite highly and acknowledge that we are making a difference." Many other women noted that they have had a good relationship with the medical community, especially some of the doctors in town who now refer patients to programs administered by the NVWIA. Similarly the NVWIA has established good relationships with Merritt Legal Services and the local detachment of the R.C.M.P..

However, a few women speculated that there was one social service agency "who feel we are duplicating a lot of services." More than one woman commented on their working relationship with the Nicola Valley Human and Family Services as difficult. The organization in question is a non-profit social planning agency that originally pooled its resources with the NVWIA in 1991 to jointly sponsor the Nicola Valley Family Therapy. Since then, the Nicola Valley Human and Family Services has been struggling to stay afloat, and one woman speculated that this particular agency "envies the legitimacy the NVWIA has gained throughout the community and the continuing commitment of our members."
4.6 Conclusion

This chapter has demonstrated why and to what extent women in Merritt have actively addressed the needs of women and families through involvement in a voluntary, community-based women's organization. There appears to be a difference between why founding members and newer members joined the organization and their level of support for feminist principles. There was a slight difference in age between the founding members and the newer members (newer members being slightly younger) as well as their length of time in the community (founding members being long-time residents of the community). As well there appears to be a notable difference between how women and men in the community have responded to the organization. On the whole, women's responses are supportive and appreciative, while men's responses tend to be more dismissive. Given the small sample size and the variety of experiences held by women and men, it may be inappropriate to generalize this information on the basis of women's duration of involvement or sex.

However, the findings outlined in this chapter provide interesting insight into the reasons why women become involved and their perceptions of how others in the community view their activities. Perceptions may be changing as the organization creates noticeable improvements in the situation of women and families. The final chapter will examine in more details the dynamic factors that led to the formation of the NVWIA and the forces that helped or hindered the ability of the NVWIA to engage in gender-sensitive community organizing.
CHAPTER 5

ANALYSIS OF WOMEN'S ORGANIZED ACTION IN MERRITT

5.0 Introduction

There are elements of the dynamics and activities of rural life which influence and affect the ability of women to engage in gender-informed community organizing. The first part of this chapter discusses the motivating forces which influenced the formation of the NVWIA. The second part of this chapter identifies the various opportunities and constraints that support and/or limit women's abilities to engage in community organizing for change in Merritt. Both the motivating factors and the opportunities and constraints were identified through the case study (i.e., findings from the review of organizational literature, observations and interviews with the members of the NVWIA).

5.1 Motivating Forces

Certain dynamic and interrelated forces influenced the formation of the Nicola Valley Women in Action. They include (1) changing demographic, economic and social circumstances; (2) the historical lack of attention paid by institutional (mainstream) planning initiatives to gender issues; and (3) the limited availability of opportunities for women in Merritt to influence decision-making. It should be noted that these forces are not meant to be interpreted as independent or chronologically/causally related (even though obvious connections can be made between the lack of attention paid to gender issues in planning and barriers to women's involvement in the planning process). Rather these three factor should be treated as interdependent and dynamic characteristics of Merritt which all contributed to the formation of the NVWIA. The inter-relatedness among the factors make it difficult to analyze each separately; however, to emphasize their importance, each will be discussed in sequence given.
5.1.1 Changing Community Characteristics

Merritt, like many communities in British Columbia, has been experiencing demographic, social and cultural changes over the last few decades which are undermining community well-being. Rural areas in British Columbia have been at the mercy of global economic re-structuring due to environmental degradation and the de-emphasis of resource-based industries. Although the rate of population growth in Merritt between 1986 and 1991 was small, the population has both been increasing and changing. Increasing ethno-cultural diversity, changing family structures, decreasing opportunities in the employment sector of resource-based industries, and the lack of alternative employment have been the cause of numerous social problems manifested by economic instability, inequality, and poverty.

Many of the changes occurring in Merritt reflect larger trends in society. Increasing violence, addiction, family break-down and racial and cultural conflict are not problems unique to the City of Merritt. Since many of the socio-economic changes that create social problems originate from outside the realm of local control, it is becoming more and more difficult for the local decision-makers in cities such as Merritt to respond to, plan for, and manage social problems. As well, the emergence of values such as sustainability, self-determination and social justice have raised doubts regarding the effectiveness of traditional planning processes. The need for sustainable and alternative strategies to improve social and economic circumstances is influencing community residents to create their own strategies and demand changes in their own image.

A number of community-based initiatives were formulated in the last two decades to respond to socio-economic problems in Merritt. A Community Futures Association, a Healthy Communities Committee, a Resource and Land Use Group, are three examples of bottom-up approaches to community planning that were implemented since 1990. These initiatives are indicative of the frustration residents felt toward the traditional processes of economic development and
methods of securing socio-economic welfare. They also symbolize changes that are occurring in the values of society as a whole. In general, the conviction is growing that community development is the most appropriate basis for identifying and organizing to address socio-economic needs at the local level (SPARC 1991). Community development is a movement that seeks to establish local democratic decision-making institutions (Midgley 1986:17) and has been described as a process of

organizing, learning, and mandating practices which increase capabilities not only to reach existing goals but also to work toward a broader range of goals (Boothroyd 1991:104).

In summary, dynamic changes (and resulting social problems) were impacting the community of Merritt. Residents concerned about their quality of life were realizing that changes were necessary in the way things had always been done (i.e., relying on government or the market to solve economic and social problems). Groups that had been marginalized from decision-making were beginning to demand opportunities to participate in decisions that were directly influencing their well-being. This led to the creation of numerous grass-roots strategies for community development (including the formation of the Nicola Valley Women in Action). However, there are two other factors that may be seen as particularly relevant to the formation of a women's planning strategy—the lack of attention paid to the gender issues in planning and the existence of barriers that limit women's opportunities to become involved in community decision-making.

5.1.2 Lack of Gender-Sensitivity in Planning

It should be noted that the changing community characteristics described above were affecting both male and female residents, nonetheless they were differentially impacting the quality of their lives. Women in Merritt were especially challenged by the prevalence of wife battering, child abuse and sexual violence, lack of basic services to meet their needs, and the scarcity of
opportunities and choices for employment. Prior to 1991 the small size (approximately 6,000 residents) and relatively isolated location (especially before the final construction of the Coquihalla Highway) made it difficult for women suffering from spousal abuse to access services that would support their needs. Social services, such as the crisis line, were no longer available in the community, other services were currently being underfunded given the demand (i.e. family therapy) and others simply did not exist (i.e., licensed child care) (Anderson 1991). In addition, the cultural diversity of Merritt's population presented further challenges to service providers attempting to meet the needs of all groups in the community. Employment opportunities were limited for all residents; but were the least sufficient for women seeking full-time work.

However planning did not appear to be particularly sensitive to the implications of community changes on women. In the case of Merritt, municipal public policy had ignored some of the most vital needs of women and families. As Chapter Three outlined, all of the institutional planning reports reviewed had failed to acknowledge gender issues. As well, a few of the community-based strategies had also failed to disaggregate their findings along gender lines. The general omission of gender perspectives in mainstream and community-based planning reports were ignoring the particular implications of changing community characteristics on women. Prior to 1991, issues such as the need for services to meet the needs of women suffering from violence and abuse (i.e., feminist-informed support and counseling), the needs of minority women and disadvantaged women (i.e., ESL training and employment skills) and working women (day-care) had not been addressed via the public agenda. Hence planning had failed to acknowledge the particular relevance of these social issues on the lives of women. In failing to recognize the specific needs of women, rural planners were acting under an implicit bias--that community needs are universal, that socio-economic well-being is economically based and that everyone has an equal chance to become involved.
For the most part, the gender implications of planning issues have not been thoroughly explored in the institutionalized sphere of planning, resulting in a misrepresentation of the severity of social, economic and environmental issues faced by women in Merritt. This finding supports the ideas of feminist planning theorists who contend that mainstream planning in general lacks an awareness of the importance of gender in public policy and decision-making. Since institutional and male-led planning strategies in Merritt were not sensitized to the needs of the female population (or the barriers imposed by gender roles and expectations), issues presenting particular challenges demanded a particular kind of planning. Given that mainstream planning in Merritt was failing to adequately address the needs of women and families, it is not surprising that women in Merritt responded by creating their own means of planning for women's needs. The creation of the NVWIA was in direct response to the need for an alternative planning approach - one sensitized to the needs and concerns of women. The formation of the NVWIA can be seen as a strategy to undertake planning from a women's perspective. For this reason, the lack of attention paid to gender issues (issues of diversity) in planning has been identified as one of the key motivating forces behind the creation of the NVWIA.

5.1.3 Lack of Opportunities to Influence Decision-Making

Another factor that influenced the formation of the NVWIA was the lack of opportunities for women in Merritt to involve themselves in municipal planning and decision-making. Women in Merritt, as in other primary resource towns, have had fewer opportunities to participate in a paid public decision-making capacity than men. As demonstrated in Chapter Three, Merritt's economy is largely resourced based. An historical reliance on primary-resources and the lack of secondary manufacturing or other work opportunities has limited women's access to employment. Fewer employment opportunities available to women has meant women in Merritt have had fewer opportunities to hold positions of authority in the community—as business owners, management or union leaders. It was my observation that opportunities to become involved in community-wide decision-making, such as being asked to sit on the local
Economic Development Committee or the Community Land Use and Resource Group, were more likely to be offered to men.

Also indicated in Chapter Four, women face barriers that hinder their rights and abilities to live as equal members of the community. Barriers such as the lack of support services for women, the prevalence of domestic violence and abuse, ethno-cultural and language differences and a negative opinion of feminist activism have prevented some women in the community from becoming more active in community affairs. There are notable examples of females involved in decision-making such as the female mayor Merritt has elected for the past couple of years and the two female council members. However before the creation of the NVWIA, there was no specific organization or structure in existence whose purpose was to raise awareness of women's issues and promote services that give women the opportunity to overcome barriers that hinder their abilities to participate in the community. Hence the need for such an organization can be seen as one of the final motivating factors behind the creation of the NVWIA.

5.2 Opportunities for Gender-Sensitive Community Organizing

Why was it seemingly so easy for a voluntary group of women to organize themselves, gather relevant information, formulate recommendations and act on these recommendations—in other words undertake community planning? What was it that made their planning efforts so successful - the availability of funding, voluntary resources and personal energy? conviction and commitment? the knowledge that women must act in order to have their needs met in the public arena? This section will outline the opportunities that enhanced this organization's ability to engage in a women-informed community organizing strategy.

5.2.1 Government Incentive

Government incentive provided by the Ministry of Women's Programs and the Minister Responsible for Families (in particular, the Regional Director Ann Davis) can be seen as the
first force that aided in the development of the NVWIA. Although individual women in the community were responsible for organizing the first forum on women's needs, this forum may not have been held without the encouragement and support of the Regional Director. This government agent encouraged the women in the Nicola Valley to collectively organize themselves and she offered invaluable assistance, advice and support that allowed the NVWIA to formulate a plan of action.

Government funding, in the form of grants, also enabled the NVWIA to undertake specific projects. Both the Needs Assessment and the Family Centre were projects made possible through government resources. Funding for the Women's Community Needs Assessment and the development of the Family Center was provided by the Women's Grants Program of the Ministry of Women's Programs and the Minister Responsible for Families. Funding for the Cross Cultural Communication Workshop and the Building Community Workshops was provided from various government and non-government sources in particular, Heritage Canada, B.C. Multiculturalism, the Legal Services Society of British Columbia, and the City of Merritt.

5.2.2 Support from the Mayor

From the very inception of the organization, support, advice and assistance has been forthcoming from the Mayor of Merritt, the Honorable Clara Norgaard. The mayor was in attendance at the first forum and was responsible for conceiving the name the organization eventually chose to call themselves. The mayor has offered on-going support for the various programs sponsored by NVWIA, she has endorsed the Cross-Cultural Communication and Community Building Workshops co-sponsored by the organization, and has publicly acknowledged the work done by the NVWIA on more than one occasion. In addition, the Mayor of Merritt was been instrumental in spreading the word about the value of the work done by the NVWIA to other communities in British Columbia. She did this by inviting the past Coordinator to speak at a conference sponsored by the BC Union of Municipalities. Given the
limited influence of community-based social service agencies to influence change at the local level, opportunities to meet the needs of women and the community were greatly enhanced by the personal support of a powerful person such as the Mayor.

5.2.3 Interagency Co-operation

The support and co-operation of other social service agencies has also allowed the NVWIA to successfully meet their objectives as an organization. Inter-agency co-operation has allowed the NVWIA to promote an awareness of women's issues in the Nicola Valley and to provide support services for women and families. To begin with, inter-agency cooperation allowed the group to co-sponsor a number of initiatives to raise awareness and address community issues. In terms of racism, the organization organized and co-facilitated workshops in collaboration with another non-profit agency, Merritt Legal Services. The co-operative approach taken by the organization was a pioneer effort; it enabled the organization to seek collective solutions to complex problems that no one single agency had been willing to tackle on their own in the past.

Interagency co-operation has also allowed the NVWIA to jointly provide services such as Nicola Valley Family Services (in conjunction with the Nicola Valley Human and Family Services) and the Victim’s Support Services (with the assistance of the R.C.M.P.). The respect and support these agencies have given the NVWIA has been invaluable, aiding in its ability to plan for the needs of the larger community in an integrated and sensitive manner.

5.2.4 Leadership Skills and Abilities of the Founding Members

In the case of the NVWIA, key women in the community took it upon themselves to create a planning process that was more relevant to their needs. The leadership skills and abilities of two key founding members may be seen as another factor that enabled the organization to effectively move forward as an organization. Both women were knowledgeable, long-term and well-respected members of the community. Together they had been working as service
providers for a local non-profit in the community for some time. Since these two women were responsible for organizing the initial forum, they provided the opportunity for women to collectively create the NVWIA. Even more, these two women had gained considerable knowledge and insight into the situation of abused women in the valley through their work as community caretakers. Their knowledge, experience and leadership skills enhanced the organization's ability to fully understand and therefore appropriately address the situation facing women. In addition, when one of the two women was elected as the founding president of the organization, her reputation as a respected and co-operative service provider ensured the newly formed Society a solid level of legitimacy in the community.

5.2.5 Proactive Incremental Approach

The NVWIA began with a proactive, task-oriented incremental approach. This straightforward approach emphasized action and allowed the founding members to move quickly and attain tangible results. Within its first year of operation, the NVWIA had conducted the Needs Assessment, made recommendations, and implemented numerous services in the community. Needs identified by the Needs Assessment had not been previously recognized by those in formal institutional decision-making capacity nor acted upon with such diligence or expediency. Their approach enabled them to both efficiently and successfully acknowledge and act upon the need for planning from a woman's perspective and the need for opportunities for women to be directly involved in decision-making.

The founding members did not hesitate to assume direct action as the most logical and effective means of dealing with the complexity of issues faced by women in their community. They did not look to the local institutional planning structures for direction, nor did they rely on external 'experts' to tell them what their needs were. In short, they were confident in their ability to proactively plan for, and support, women's particular needs. Their self-assurance and their
approach of women-centered planning helped women empower themselves and aided in their ability to engage in 'gender-sensitive' community organizing.

5.3 Barriers to Gender-Sensitive Community Organizing

Given the extent of the NVWIA’s success as an organizing strategy, it may be speculated that the typical barriers that hinder women’s collective activities were successfully overcome by the approach utilized by the members of the NVWIA. However, women in the Nicola Valley continue to face a number of challenges that impede their ability to engage in gender-sensitive community organizing. Barriers identified through the interviews and observations are described below.

5.3.1 Lack of Long Term Funding

Over the last decade, there have been budget cut-backs to the non-profit sector in general. These cut-backs limit the ability of all non-profit societies to meet their objectives. Initially, the organization was able to apply for short-term project funding which allowed them to hire a researcher to conduct the Needs Assessment. As well, the organization received monies that enabled them to develop and operate the Family Centre and undertake community development in the area of racism. However, funding for these projects came in the form of project-oriented grants with limited time frames. The lack of long term resources to fund the ongoing operations of the organization has limited the ability of the NVWIA to maintain its current level of service. For example, the NVWIA were forced to close down the Family Centre when funding for the position of Coordinator expired. Even when funding was available for this part-time staff person, I was told that the Coordinator worked well in excess of part-time hours without pay.

This is typical of many non-profit organizations who are dependent on the volunteer time of their employees in order to manage their burgeoning work-loads. Nonetheless, the former
coordinator realized that all too often women (and others) employed by non-profit agencies are easily ‘guilted’ into working without renumeration. Therefore she made a point of refusing to continue working on a voluntary basis once the funding ran out. The lack of ongoing funding not only prevented the NVWIA from maintaining its resource centre, it has also prevented the organization from hiring an administrator to administrate the day-to-day working operations of the organization. Since no one was paid to administer the Society in the past, a great portion of meeting time had to be dedicated to sorting through all the administrative and funding details, which in turn meant less time could be spent on organizational development.

5.3.2 Lack of a Representative Membership

As mentioned in Chapter Three, a majority of the twelve members interviewed were middle-aged, white, married and formally educated women working in a professional capacity in the community. Only two of the women interviewed were visible minorities. Only one newer member identified herself as both unemployed and a single parent. This small group does not represent the previous and present membership of the NVWIA; however, it should be noted that there was a obvious lack of diversity (visible differences) reflected among the active members interviewed.

The lack of diversity among the current membership of the NVWIA means that a variety of perspectives based on different life experiences—experiences influenced by differences in age, physical ability, marital status, class, sexual orientation or ethno-cultural background— is missing. There were no teen-age or senior women members, no women with physical disabilities, only one single parent and a small number of women from visible minority groups among the members of the group. Thus the NVWIA does not appear to be representative of the diversity of women residing in Merritt as a whole.
It is important to note that the active members of the NVWIA may not represent an overly diverse group of women, but this is not meant to imply that the organization has not attempted to be as inclusive as possible. It was stated in Chapter Three that members are cognizant of the fact that the NVWIA might appear to be an elite or privileged group of women and have made efforts to involve all kinds of women. Members attributed the under-representativeness of the organization to a number of barriers that limit women’s abilities to be involved in their community and to women’s hesitation to become involved.

The lack of minority women in the organization may be due to the barriers identified by the women (the existence of poverty, violence and abuse, ethno-cultural barriers, and mistrust of feminism), but they may also be due to the structure underlying the operation of the NVWIA. As far as I could tell, NVWIA meetings are held according to a fairly fixed schedule (bi-monthly meetings are held the same time on the same night in the same location) and adhere to a very traditional set of procedures (i.e., Robert’s Rules). Child-care was not provided and it was not obvious whether members were encouraged to bring children to their meetings. The lack of diversity in timing, location, and the traditional structure of NVWIA meetings may be limiting the ability of the organization to achieve diversity in its membership. Single women with small children may be unable to attend evening meetings, as well, minority women may not be comfortable with the use of formal meeting procedures. The absence of alternative opportunities to be involved with the group (besides attending meetings or sitting on committees) may be another factor which limits the participation of a wider group of women.

Therefore the lack of representativeness among the present membership of the NVWIA and their limited ability to attract a diverse membership may be partly due to its traditional structure. Being sensitive to diversity and acknowledging a variety of experiences is an essential component of a gender-sensitive planning approach; therefore the lack of
representativeness may harm the organization's ability to truly understand the complexity of issues faced by marginalized women.

5.3.3 Institutional Obligations

To be eligible for government funding, the NVWIA had to apply for non-profit status. In order to be granted non-profit status, the NVWIA had to structure their organization in accordance with the regulations governing non-profit agencies. In other words, the members had to prepare a constitution, a set of by-laws, and elect a president, vice-president and board of directors which usually results in a very traditional, hierarchical leadership structure, one most often used by a variety of male-dominated organizations. As stated above, this structure may present barriers to inclusiveness. It also may limit the ability of women to employ creative feminist-based structures that might better suit their needs or comfort levels.

Institutional frameworks, such as those monitoring the internal practices and operation of non-profit agencies, do not lend themselves to the organizational functioning demands sensitized to or preferred by women's organizations such as consensus decision-making or non-hierarchical power structures. Consensus decision-making, or sharing and rotating jobs are typical processes used by feminist collectives to ensure that responsibility, knowledge and accountability will be shared equally among all members (Ristock 1991:53). Newer members of the NVWIA appeared to be driven by a desire to promote the use of similar methods within the internal dynamics of their organization. On the other hand, the founding members were more comfortable mimicking the forms of other (malestream) community organizations.

It was important to the founding group to portray a co-operative and professional appearance, and the traditional "Society" structure helped them to legitimate their presence in the formal realm of community decision-making. They were satisfied using a very non-confrontational approach in their efforts to confront some of the community's most pressing issues because the
"service-oriented" and formal "Societal" role is part of the larger mainstream culture and tradition.

The particular structure maintained by the NVWIA Society impedes its potential to facilitate change that will ultimately empower women. Many contradictions are inherent in the structure of a mainstream social service system and the principles of feminist activism (i.e., activities such as lobbying, demonstrating, and building-coalitions). The structures and processes used by mainstream social service agencies have been described as "oppressive" (Ristock 1991:47) to women as they reaffirm positions of "helper" and "recipient". Hence, the institutional frameworks guiding the operation of the NVWIA may act as a barrier to more creative gender-sensitive community organizing strategies.

5.3.4 Lack of a Shared Ideological Commitment

As noted in the preceding chapter, there were philosophical differences behind the motivations described given by the founding and newer members. It is obvious that the founding and newer members did not become members of the NVWIA for the same reasons. They also held ideologically different perceptions of the notion of 'feminism' and the value of promoting themselves as a feminist organization, or even associating themselves with the women's movement. From the interview findings it is clear that the founding members did not want the organization to be labeled feminist, they saw any association with feminism in a negative light. They appeared to be primarily motivated by altruistic/philanthropic reasons, more than by a commitment to feminist-based principles. Throughout the interviews several founding members voiced their desire to not be seen as "selfish" or "radical". They wanted to be perceived as a non-political and cooperative group of concerned citizens, and made efforts to serve the needs of men as well as women.
Newer Members appeared to be motivated by more political reasons, what might be interpreted as a conscious, feminist-informed determination to address women's issues. They expressed their desire to be involved with a progressive women's organization in order to address a variety of issues relating to women rather than simply meet women's needs through a 'band-aid' approach. I sensed that a few of the newer members were disappointed when the structure and representativeness of the organization did not meet their expectations. As members they soon realized that the organization was less of a radical feminist-based organization and more of a social service agency made up of middle-class, non-explicit feminist members.

These obvious differences in the degree of support for feminist alignment points to the lack of a shared ideological commitment. The reluctance of some members to take on a more overtly feminist approach may be seen as a barrier by the newer members wishing to confront broader issues of male-domination and oppression. For example, it was noted in Chapter Four that one newer member recognized the need to become more political (i.e., lobby city council etc.) in order to effect changes at the policy level that will benefit community women. Another newer member told me she thought the NVWIA should not only be meeting the needs of abused women through crisis intervention and family counseling. The organization should also be addressing the issue of violence "as a chosen response" embedded in the patriarchy of male power.

Further, in contrast to the founding members, newer members did not ascribe to the notion that it is "selfish" to concentrate on issues relating only to women. A few of them strongly felt that the NVWIA should focus on problems particularly relevant to younger women, such as teen pregnancy or date rape. A majority of the newer members were adamant that the situation of women can only be improved through collective action and reform advocacy that goes to the roots of the problem. Without a shared ideological commitment to feminist beliefs and principles, the NVWIA are limited in their ability to meet women's strategic needs. That is,
they do not have the capacity to influence changes at a different level, for example at a policy level, or at a practical level (reformulating the approaches or values underlying mainstream planning).

5.3.5 Anti-feminist Sentiment
Support for feminist activism in rural areas is weak even among women involved in what I would refer to as a "feminist-informed women’s organization", not to mention the more conservative residents of the community. The existence of anti-feminist sentiment, the resistance held by some women to be labeled feminists added to the constraining influence of a negative stereotype of feminism held by male members of the community at large acts as an ongoing barrier. As evident from the interview findings, belief in traditional gender roles is still prevalent among community members in smaller, resource-based areas and in many respects, the influence of gender stereo-types or chauvinistic attitudes deter women's involvement.

Unfortunately, anti-feminist backlash and conservatism appear to be on the rise in society as a whole (Faludi 1991). As a result, organizations like the NVWIA suffer from the consequences of conservative backlash even though they themselves do not explicitly promote themselves as a feminist organization.

5.3.6 Limits to Voluntary Time and Energy
Participation in any voluntary organization depends on the unbound energy and unpaid labour of its members. Women have always been more active in a voluntary capacity than men since the community or neighbourhood has historically been seen as the women's sphere. Societal expectations that ‘good’ women should willingly and gladly donate their free time to their community (free as in ‘without pay’) only increases the burden of social responsibilities placed on women. Time limitations resulting from this expectation significantly affect their ability to effectively participate in a gender-sensitive women’s organization.
Actively participating in a progressive women's planning organization means that women must find extra time to meet their expectations and fulfill their roles as wife, mother, elder caretaker, wage-earner and community caretaker or activist. As demonstrated in the research findings, women who become 'overly-involved' may experience guilt for neglecting other responsibilities; at the same time they feel socially and politically obligated to contribute to the betterment of their community.

5.4 The Value of “Planning From the Fringes”

Women's community organizing, or what might be referred to as planning from the fringes has successfully picked up where mainstream planning left off. Although their work may not be seen as 'community planning' by some, the women of this organization were successfully doing 'planning', that is, applying local knowledge to specific problems in the public domain (Friedmann, 1987). Their actions did not result in the formulation of policy, however, it did lead to substantive results. Merritt now has services that meet the needs of a significant proportion of the population. The work of the NVWIA has not only benefited women and families in crisis, as noted earlier, it has raised the awareness of women's needs in the community, provided jobs, and met the needs of community members in a sensitive, holistic manner.

In their work, the NVWIA followed the steps of a recognizable process of community planning as described by Milson (1974:34):

1. **Needs Identification**

   The NVWIA began their planning process by identifying their needs both through an initial forum and more formally through a Needs Assessment.
(2) **Priority Setting**
Following the Needs Assessment, the organization chose the top twelve issues identified through their research and set priorities in the form of recommendations for action.

(3) **Decision-Making based on Needs and Priorities**
In the course of implementing their recommendations, the NVWIA made decisions based on their needs and their priorities. Some of the decisions the NVWIA were faced with include decisions on how to structure themselves, how to recruit members, how to seek funding, how to go about sponsoring direct services, who to involve and how to undertake advocacy and community education.

(4) **Evaluation**
The members of the NVWIA continue to evaluate their programs and their underlying purpose and role in the community. This is evident in the changes that have been made to the Assaultive Men's Program and the newly articulated Mission Statement and Statement of Principles.

(5) **Re-planning**
At the time the interviews took place with members of the NVWIA, the organization was at a point of reflection. They informed me that following an evaluation of their current programs, they would look for new ways to improve the services and create new means to address further issues in the community.

However, there are elements of the actions taken by the NVWIA that distinguish their activities from typical planning processes. One of the main differences is the value-base or principles driving their activities. Women's community organizing for change, like gender-sensitive planning, recognizes that women experience the social, political and economic life of a community differently than men. The work of grass-roots women's organizations ensures that women's needs are met by raising awareness of issues affecting women, making recommendations, implementing direct action, and basically employing a values-based and holistic approach to enhancing community-based well-being. In contrast to mainstream planning strategies, women's organized action in Merritt played four key roles:
• Raising awareness of issues of diversity (based on gender, ethnicity and race)
• Fostering self-determination
• Acknowledging barriers that limit women's potential to participate
• Supporting women's basic and strategic needs

5.4.1 Raising Awareness of Issues of Diversity

There are those that believe that planning can never be sensitive to the range of diversity, but as this study has shown, grass-roots women's organizing has widened the perspective and potential of planning to acknowledge diversity and bring attention to those issues unaddressed by institutional planning. The actions undertaken by the NVWIA responded to the needs of women and other marginalized groups. The NVWIA has been instrumental in uncovering the needs faced by women living in a small, resource-based community and has forced the community to take ownership of these issues. The Needs Assessment drew attention to women's needs in general, and uncovered issues that could no longer go unnoticed. In many respects, community-based initiatives, as in the actions undertaken by the NVWIA, represent an approach to planning that recognizes a diversity of community needs.

5.4.2 Fostering Self-Determination

The approach taken by the NVWIA has enabled women to be involved in a process of self-definition and self-determination from its very inception. From the first meeting, women from all walks of life were encouraged to participate in generating a preliminary list of their unmet needs. As citizens and service providers they were systematically consulted through research to determine the extent of these needs. As members of the NVWIA they were involved in prioritizing and implementing various recommendations from the Needs Assessment.

The action taken by this women's group has fostered the participation of community residents who may not have had the opportunity or the willingness to involve themselves in community
planning issues. However, the involvement of mostly professional women in the organization, rather than those women the organization is attempting to serve, has been noted. The non-participation of minority women or recipients of community services is an issue of which the members are cognizant, and are exploring further. However, their approach represents an attempt to plan whereby local groups and individuals are encouraged to raise issues of concern and take action from their own perspective. In my opinion, the well-being of women in Merritt has been enhanced by the NVWIA through the opportunity this organization has given women to experience self-determination, shared ownership, and understanding.

5.4.3 Acknowledging the Barriers that Limit Women's Participation

Many barriers exist to hamper the participation of certain women in their communities, even in the most supportive environments. As demonstrated in the previous chapter, members of the NVWIA were aware of a number of barriers that impede women's abilities to fully participate in social and economic life of Merritt, and with their organization. The NVWIA's awareness of women's barriers allowed them to concentrate on efforts to overcome barriers as part of their role in the community. Throughout their efforts to foster self-determination and meet women's basic and strategic needs among women, the NVWIA has maintained a commitment to addressing issues such as low self-esteem which hinder women's participation. In theory, they advocate social action that benefits the status and opportunities of women, and at the same time they acknowledge the interdependence of men and women by addressing issues that are shared by both. By acknowledging and attempting to overcome barriers to women's involvement in their community women's organized action has given women the opportunity to become involved and this has raised the level of well-being for themselves and the rest of the community.
5.4.4 Supporting Women's Basic and Strategic Needs

The mission underlying the NVWIA has been to support women in their efforts to develop themselves personally so that they may pursue common goals on behalf of the community. Specific programs sponsored by this organization recognize the basic needs of those who suffer from issues of family violence such as wife assault, sexual assault, child sexual assault, mental and emotional abuse, co-dependence, etc. Other activities, such as advocacy and community development, strive to meet their strategic needs by improving their opportunities, personal capacities, and coping abilities.

5.5 Implications for Community Planning

5.5.1 Implications for Federal and Provincial Planners

This research has demonstrated both the need for, and the potential value of, grass-roots or community-based strategies for change. Given the broader context of social policy reform, the ability of federal and provincial governments to effectively meet the needs of a diverse population is under attack. There is a need to integrate social and economic policy and to develop a gender-sensitive social policy agenda. The capacity of the women's popular sector to stake alternative claims that focus on a different vision and undertake proactive, collaborative processes for change at the local level should not be ignored. Their work attempts to fill the gaps between what a community or group decides is necessary to its continued well-being and what local government is presently doing to meet its needs. Since efforts at improving community well-being through a community development approach are being successfully undertaken by women's organizations, there is a number of areas where professional planners can support and facilitate both the formation and the on-going work of organizations such as the NVWIA.

There is a need for federal and provincial governments to continue funding grass-roots organizations and to make the restrictions and obligations tied to government funding less
binding. As this research demonstrated, government incentive played an indisputable role in shaping the development of the NVWIA. Funding provided by the Ministry of Women's Programs and the Minister Responsible for Families allowed the women to undertake a comprehensive assessment of the needs and priorities of women in Merritt. Female community residents were active participants in this initiative, resulting in a process that enhanced their meaningful involvement and empowerment. Government funding also enabled the group to temporarily finance its resource centre, however, when this short-term funding terminated, the NVWIA were forced to close its doors.

Provincial policy-makers should recognize the important role that grant programs sponsored by ministries like Ministry of Women's Programs and the Minister Responsible for Families play by facilitating women's opportunities to collectively meet their own needs. They should also realize the value in supporting collaborative processes initiated by community stakeholders. Inter-agency collaboration is also made possible by the joint funding and government partnerships necessary to address issues from an integrative approach. In addition, there is a need to for policy makers to recognize that institutional obligations may restrict the ability of non-profit women's societies to employ feminist strategies and processes.

Unfortunately, current federal social policy review points to the government's wish to greatly reduce the amount of direct spending to provinces which in turn would limit the amount of funding available for local non-profit organizations and community projects. This will undoubtedly have a detrimental effect on family and child welfare, and in particular, women's equality. Without government assistance and funding, organizations like the NVWIA will no longer be able to provide the level of services that attempt to improve the social opportunities, participation, justice, and equality of women in community.
Another important implication of this research is related to the lack of attention paid by institutionalized planning to gender as a variable in planning research and policy formation. There is a growing need for professional planners to realize the impacts and implications of gender-neutral planning, research and policy formation. This research has demonstrated that one of the factors that influenced the need for a women's planning organization was the lack of attention paid to women's needs and priorities. Policy and decision-making that does not acknowledge the gendered dimensions of socio-economic changes also fails to recognize the women are disproportionately affected by gender-blind social and economic policies.

There are several things that professional planners can do to encourage a gender-sensitive approach to planning. Contemporary planners must begin by considering the respective roles of women and men in the formation of social policy and make reference to gender differences in the discussion of research findings and recommendations. Planning research should undertake both qualitative and quantitative research in order to get an accurate picture of the situation facing community members. As well, quantitative data should be disaggregated on the basis of gender in order to recognize the differences in how planning issues affect women and men. Failure to recognize the implications of research devoid of gender sensitivity means that policies created on behalf of biased research findings will not likely advance the status of Canadian women. A gender-sensitive perspective is essential in order to work toward social policies that promote women's equality.

5.5.2 Implications for Local Government and Municipal Planning

This research has demonstrated that a critical component of the NVWIA's success was due to the support and official recognition from one of their community leaders. In rural and smaller areas, planning and public decision-making often fall into the hands of elected community planners - politicians, councilors and civil servants. Unfortunately, professional planners may or may not be employed in smaller areas, and if so, are often responsible for traditional land use
and development activities such as the implementation of Official Community Plans, approving development applications, subdivision requests and building permits. Rarely do professional planners have the opportunity to engage in community social planning or advocate any specific needs of community members. Municipal social planners are rarely employed in the majority of smaller areas (under population of 10,000), hence, the role of awareness raising/consciousness building is often led by voluntary social planning councils, not-for-profit organizations, and women's groups.

However, women's groups in rural areas are typically small organizations with no power to affect the work of traditional, larger and more powerful structures such as local councils. This research has shown that the opportunities of women's groups, like all other community-based organizations, are greatly enhanced when given support from those in power. At the same time, one of the barriers that impedes their ability to engage in gender-sensitive community organizing is conservative attitudes held by those in power.

Formal community planners, such as politicians, councilors and civil servants, other elected or appointed public decision-makers and members of Advisory Committees, Planning Committees, Economic Development Committees, or those actors or organizations that have a legal or recognizable role in the traditional processes of planning must be aware of the efforts of "informal" planning experts. Since women interested in community affairs are more likely to be active in a voluntary capacity rather than a paid position, this impacts the effectiveness of their efforts. Voluntary community social service agencies "working on the fringes" do not have a recognizable or formal position in the community planning process, and as a result, have little influence on the development of social policy issues (Wharf 1992).

The implication for local government points to the need to incorporate or formalize the role of community-based organizations in community planning. By "formalize" I am referring to giving
an organization like the NVWIA a recognized, legitimized and consistent means of participating in community decision-making. The contributions made by the NVWIA to the economic, political and social well-being of the community may not be apparent when viewed through male-biased or expert-driven lenses, however, it is incorrect to assume that women do not have an important role to play in improving and maintaining the conditions of public life. This study has identified the important role the NVWIA plays in raising awareness of issues of diversity, fostering self-determination, acknowledging barriers to women's involvement and supporting women's basic and strategic needs; therefore it is up to community leaders to acknowledge and legitimate their contributions through the community planning process.

There are many aspects to legitimacy including the participation of community actors in designing the process and paying attention to whose voices are given, either consciously or unconsciously, a greater weight in the community planning process. The intention of the planning process, from my perspective, is to help groups in society to become better equipped to solve their common problems. The potential of community-based organizations to influence social policy at the local level has been examined by Wharf (1992:26). He found that influence may be dependent on the "convergence of interest," a concept used in previous studies of community and social policy as an explanation of how issues get placed on the public agenda. Convergence of interest relates to two conditions that determine "the probability that a proposed action will move from the stage of initiation to that of legitimization." The first condition is the legitimacy of the initiator and the second is the degree to which their "proposed action is compatible with existing conceptions of 'community welfare' " (Sower et al., 1957:64 as quoted in Wharf, 1992:26).

As explained by Wharf, community organizations in general do not have power, but they may have influence.
Power is defined here as the capacity to alter policies and decisions. This capacity may be exercised through persuasion, rewards, or other means of securing compliance, but where these strategies fail policy-makers can bring about change on a unilateral basis. Influence is viewed as an attempt to convince policy-makers of the need for change. Policy-makers have power, social reform organizations possess varying degrees of influence, but not power. (Wharf 1992:26)

Broadly defined “planning” is an appropriate term to describe the process community-based groups endeavor to identify and organize to address socio-economic needs at the local level. This reconceptualization of the planning process requires fundamental changes in the political process and the role of the planner. Under such a regime municipal planners become more than ever, facilitators and resource persons. The task of the planner is to provide the required information and technical expertise to more fully empower the local populace, and to aid in the attainment of goals and objectives.

5.5.3 Implications for Self-Help Planners

This study has identified various opportunities that helped women to collectively organize. Two of these opportunities are directly related to the approach taken by and the abilities of the women themselves. Whether or not individual members became involved for philanthropic reasons or for more political reasons, crucial to the development of the NVWIA were the leadership skills and abilities of its founding members and their proactive, incremental approach. Their success was partly due to these two factors, therefore other self-help groups can learn from the experiences of the NVWIA’s strategy.

In the case of the NVWIA, one might speculate that its founding members were motivated to act by their general realization that women’s need were only being partially met by the present social service agencies. Their insight and experience allowed them to advocate a self-help or social service approach—an approach centered on improving the ability of women to cope with issues that were complicating their level of social well-being. However, although they raised

90
awareness of the special circumstances facing women in their community, the founding members did not consider their organization as feminist-informed or politically motivated. They were motivated to actively organize in an attempt 'help' others for philanthropic rather than political reasons. Despite the challenges the members faced in raising very delicate issues to the public agenda, they appeared determined to move forward in a non-partisan manner. In other words, they were not advocating social reform on a larger scale, they simply wanted to elicit incremental changes to help women obtain the same level and type of opportunities available in larger communities.

While the experience and insight of the founding members was important to the initial formation of the organization, newer members appear to be having a significant effect on how the organization approaches its role in the community. The motivation for involvement among newer members appears to differ from that of the founding members. The newer members are not so much motivated by the need to 'help' others, rather they are influenced by a desire to be actively involved in an organization as proactive and respected as the NVWIA. Before the creation of the NVWIA, a progressive women's group had not existed in Merritt. Now that one existed, its newest members wanted to ensure that it continued to raise awareness of women's issues and remain actively involved in promoting the well-being of female citizens.

How important is it for women's self-help organizations to be seen as feminist organizations? What self-help planners can learn from this case study is that for the founding members of the NVWIA association with feminism was not important. In fact, it was their belief that the organization was successful because they maintained a non-feminist and therefore non-threatening image. Overall, the founding members equated their success to their 'non-political' approach. There is evidence to support that their non-explicit feminist-informed approach directly has enhanced their ability to gain legitimacy in the community. At the same time, there is also evidence to support that the current approach and structure of the NVWIA is not
been able to support the wishes of some of the newer members wanting to create more
fundamental change. The lack of an ideological commitment and the institutional obligations
ddictated by the traditional Society structure are limiting the ability of the organization to
engage in gender-sensitive planning. Self-help organizations must be aware of both the
opportunities and constraints associated with a non-explicit feminist approach.

5.5.4 Implications for the Development of Gender-Sensitive Planning Theory
This study has interesting implications for feminist research and the further development of
gender-sensitive planning theory. My original intention in undertaking this case study was to
present an example of a successful feminist-informed planning strategy. However, I realized
through the course of this research that not all progressive women want to be seen as feminists.
While it was tempting to label the NVWIA as a feminist project, feminist researchers must
heed Rowbotham's warning, "there is a danger in approaching the past as colonizers, bearing
the superior wisdom of our present day women's studies departments, as we arbitrary label all
and sundry as feminist" (1992:12). Women interested in collectively organizing to meet their
needs (and the needs of families and communities members in general) do not necessarily label
themselves feminists or make conscious connections to the women's movement.

Questions such as “Where do women's organizations fit into the processes of community
planning? Can a women's group demand changes in the priorities of local levels of government?
Is the success of women's organized action dependent on the co-operation and good will of those
in power, in this case, municipal governments? How does a feminist-informed women's group (in
a smaller resource-based centre) demand changes without alienating themselves from those in
power? What is the potential of a women's organization operating in a smaller community to
promote a gender-sensitive approach at the municipal level?” still need to be addressed in
more detail.
How can the value of women's organizing for change be incorporated into planning theory? In our search for more gender-sensitive and holistic planning frameworks, planning theorists have a great wealth of information to draw on from the women's movement. The activities and strategies used by feminists to elicit changes in rural communities offer informative insight for planning and public policy. It is revealing to look at how community-based women's groups identify the issues and organize themselves to meet their own needs. The long history and modern successes gained through feminist activism (women's community organizing for change) provide an excellent starting point for the building of a value-based (gender-sensitive) planning practice. Adair and Howell note:

The conscious creation of community is not something that we need to approach in a vacuum. The women's movement, and ...liberation struggles have taught us much about how to build connections without recreating oppressive and dehumanizing elements. -- the women's movement established principles for our relations: the notions that all perspectives have to be given a voice, and that everyone's needs count. (1993:38)

There is a need for a reformulation of planning theory to counter the bias that has devalued and removed the historic contributions of women from our understanding of planning in the public domain (Sandercock and Forsyth 1990:7-8). Women have an important role in planning for community well-being. There is a role for women's organized action in promoting an alternative approach to defining community planning - especially the type of planning that promotes social and economic development that supports a woman's position in society, rather than ignores or eclipses her role. The concept of planning needs to be widened to encapsulate the activities of grass-roots feminists in their efforts to promote community well-being. Planning, as a traditional, rational, operational, and objective exercise in decision-making needs to be broadened in rural areas to encompass contextual, experiential knowledge and values based on the experiences of women and their particular struggles for equality.
The further development of gender-sensitive planning theory would promote such a transformation. If we are to "change the centre of gravity" (Gurstein 1991:1) in planning to encompass women's knowledge and experience, we need to incorporate successful and effective strategies of gender-sensitive planning practice in to our theory books. To involve more women in planning processes or positions and to integrate women's issues into existing procedures and structures cannot be the only goal (Leavitt 1981). It is much more a matter of creating an alternative planning paradigm which supports community-based emancipatory movements and does not marginalize the efforts of women's voluntary work.

5.6 Conclusion

As shown through this research, women's organized action has the potential to act as a catalyst for planning approaches that are more gender-sensitive. Unfortunately, the role of women's organizations and their position of influence in the community planning process is still not recognized. Despite their efforts, the work carried out the Society, like the work done by women and women's organizations in communities throughout history, is not recognized as "planning". Ironically, it is this work that has improved the lives of everyday people, women and their families, it is this work that promotes a more tangible, day-to-day quality of life.

As we search for ways to ensure a sustainable future for rural communities, the role of women in economic and social development deserves more consideration. Women have an important contribution to make in enhancing community well-being, and hence their work should be recognized and supported by planners and others in the field of social policy. Through the support of the federal and provincial governments, local governments and municipal planners, and other community residents gender-sensitive community development is possible.

In summary, the actions taken by the NVWIA has widened the perspective and potential of planning to respond to the needs of women and other marginalized groups. In many respects,
this community-based initiative represents a valuable approach to planning for community needs whereby local women and other individuals were encouraged to raise issues of concern and take action from their own perspective. Action taken from a women's perspective toward ending oppression and improving the well-being of women, such as sponsoring a crisis line or victim's assistance program, has an affect on the whole community. Local level changes brought about by the NVWIA have improved the quality of life for Merritt's citizens. In order to be most effective, I believe that women's organizations should embrace principles of feminism. This would allow them to both uncover and challenge the anomalies of the present dominant paradigm that impede women's full citizenship and involvement in community development, and create alternatives based on equality, and a holistic understanding of socio-economic well-being.
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Rationale for the Use of Feminist Research Methods

The case study method was selected with several objectives in mind. I chose to conduct a case study of a women's organization involved in community planning since "case studies provide the experiential, analytic, and historic information feminist researchers and activists need to understand women's lives and themselves" (Reinharz 1992:173). Further, "feminist interest in case studies (as in other research formats) stems from a desire to rectify research tainted by gynopia, misogyny, and male-dominant theorizing." (Reinharz 1992:168)

The case study is a tool of feminist research that is used to document history and generate theory. It defies the social science convention of seeking generalizations by looking instead for specificity, exceptions, and completeness. Some feminist researchers have found that social science's emphasis on generalizations has obscured phenomena important to particular groups, including women. Thus case studies are essential for putting women on the map of social life. (Reinharz 1992:174)

As Creese and Strongboad (1992:8) point out, "academe remains a chilly place for women. Too often feminist scholarship continues to be accorded little value in comparison to traditional malestream research." Academia assigns the importance of scholarly work by its use of hard, objective (reliable and replicable) research methods. On the other hand, feminist research represents a conscious movement away from such methods and has been described as "contextual, inclusive, experiential, involved, socially relevant, multi-methodological, complete but not necessarily replicable, open to the environment, and inclusive of emotions and events as experienced" (Nielsen, 1990:6).

A feminist critical perspective is slowly becoming an accepted method of research in planning and other fields of study, even though the dominant intellectual tradition has stressed the use of quantitative, scientific and objective forms of research. Quantitative research methodology distances the researcher from the subject, as information is "categorized", "analysed" and
"theorized" from above. This type of methodology seems inherently inadequate given the
subject of my thesis. My aim was to reveal how women’s organized action in their community
was invisible yet integral to the processes of community planning and to give credit for the work
that real people undertake in their communities as they "plan from below". In order to do this,
it was essential that I develop a feeling of trust and connection with the women I interviewed
in “their real life surroundings”(Mies 1992). Obviously, this would not have been possible if I
had followed a strictly quantitative approach.

Further, feminist research is often undertaken in an attempt to document that which has been
excluded - in this case - the female experience of planning in a sexist society. In the past and
still somewhat in the present, it has been argued that personal experiences, which are
important in creating awareness of women’s experiences have no place among the so called hard
methods used in dominant social research (Mies 1992). Mies (1992:66) points out that
"experience means taking real life as a starting point, its subjective concreteness as well as its
societal entanglements. We should not forget that ...women’s lives, their history, their
struggles, their ideas constitute no part of dominant science “ Therefore, much of the
enthusiasm for qualitative research methods is based on the realization that women have been
silenced in much of public discourse, that women’s substantive concerns are rarely seen as
political and many aspects of women’s experience have not yet been articulated or
conceptualized within social sciences (Boucher 1993). Qualitative methods permit women to
express their experience fully and in their own terms (Jayartne and Stewart 1991).

In addition, a case study is especially relevant for my research since it shows the limits of
generalizations. Given the transient and contextual nature of planning, a case study is the ideal
method for focussing on contemporary events where the researcher has little control over
behavioural events. Not surprisingly the case study has been a common research strategy in
planning, as well as psychology, sociology, political science and economics (Yin, 1989:14). As
Yin explains, "the distinctive need for case studies arises out of the desire to understand complex social phenomena. In brief, the case study allows an investigation to retain holistic and meaningful characteristics of real-life events -- such as...organizational and managerial processes" (Yin, 1989:14).

Limitations of the Case Study Method

There are particular limitations associated with the case study as a research methodology. While a case study allows the researcher to achieve specificity when exploring a very broad question; a common concern with the method is the lack of rigour in case study research, and the influence of bias especially when analysing findings and drawing conclusions. Feminists may argue that bias is apparent in all research, including the most rigorous and scientifically sound of methods, namely surveys or experiments (Jayaratne and Stewart 1991). Many feminist researchers are particularly open about their bias toward women-centered issues, often stating them upfront in an attempt to convey the "significance of gender as a basic feature of all social life" (Di Iorio as quoted in Reinharz 1989:46). For example, detailing a case study of the nature and significance of women's organized action in community planning allows the researcher to uncover how classical planning theory has been limited because it stems from the study of male-dominated settings.

Another limitation of the case study method may be due to its emphasis on a single case—one organization in one community—rather than a comparison of two or more case organizations. Case studies are often shunned because it is difficult for researchers to produce scientific generalizations from single or even multiple-case research. Yin provides a defense against this long-standing prejudice:

[C]ase studies, like experiments, are generalizable to theoretical propositions and not to populations or universes. In this sense, the case study, like the experiment, does not represent a 'sample,' and the investigators goal is to expand and generalize theories (analytic generalization) and not to enumerate frequencies (statistical generalization). (1989:21).
Moreover, while case studies may be criticized for their difficulty in producing a
generalization, unique examples offer "positive models to emulate, or negative models to
avoid" and the opportunity to generate inductive theory (Reinharz 1992:168). A case study of
the particular initiatives of women involved in a community-based organization can illuminate
why certain strategies of community development are successful and others not--providing the
opportunity for "experiential" learning.
28 April 1994

Dear ____________________:

Subject: The Role of Women's Organizations in Planning for Community Well-Being -
          A Case Study of the Nicola Valley Women in Action Society

My name is Lisa Griffith, I am a Masters Student in the School of Community and Regional Planning at the University of British Columbia, doing research on the role of women's organizations in the community planning process as part of my required graduating thesis. The purpose of this research is to examine the potential of a women's organization to overcome barriers that limit a woman's ability to be involved in the planning process and to promote an inclusive, integrated approach to achieving community well-being.

As a staff/board/general member of the Nicola Valley Women in Action Society (NVWIA), you have been identified as someone who may be interested in participating in this study. I would like to interview you about your perspectives of the role women's organizations can take in the community planning process, and in particular, I am interested in your opinion of where the activities undertaken by your organization "fit" into the practice of planning for community well-being in Merritt, B.C..

The interview will take no more than one and a half (1 1/2) hours and will take place at the NVWIA - Family Centre, or if you prefer and it is convenient for you, in your home sometime in the next month. In addition, I may ask you to participate in a focus group with other past and current members of the NVWIA. The focus group will be 2 hours long, and will take place at the NVWIA - Family Centre in the early evening at a mutually convenient date and time.
All information collected for this study will be kept strictly confidential. The names of all persons interviewed will not be identified, and nothing you say will be attributed to you in the thesis. If you have any questions about the interview or focus group, or about the research in general, please feel free to telephone me at (604) 736-4682. You may also contact my research advisor, Dr. Penelope Gurstein, at 822-6065.

If, for any reason you do not want to participate in this study, please be assured this will not have a negative effect on you or your membership in the NVWIA. Also, if at any time during the study you decide to withdraw or not participate further, I will respect that decision.

This letter will serve as a consent form, and if you decide to participate in the study, please sign below. Your signature indicates that you have agreed to participate in the study. You will receive a copy of this letter for your own records. If you decide to participate, please call the office of the NVWIA at 378-5010 or call me (collect) in Vancouver at 736-4682 to set up a meeting time.

Thank you very much for your attention to this letter, I hope to meet you soon.

Sincerely,

Lisa Griffith
M.A. student, School of Community and Regional Planning

I, ____________________________, have read and understood the details of the study The Role of Women's Organizations in Planning for Community Well-Being - A Case Study of the Nicola Valley Women in Action Society conducted by Lisa Griffith, M. A. student, UBC. I agree to participate in an interview and focus group for this study.

______________________________  ____________________________
Signature of Participant Date
APPENDIX 3

INTERVIEW GUIDE

The following questions are intended to act as a guide for open-ended interviews with members (including staff, board and general members) of a selected women's organization. The interviews will last no longer than one-and-half hours and will take place at the home of the resident or in the office of the women's organization. This is intended to be a guide, not a structured questionnaire, therefore the questions may not be answered in the sequence given.

I. General theme: The Beginnings of the Organization
A basic description of the history of the organization including impetus for the organization, types of activities, organizational structure, number of original members involved, and its original role in the community's decision-making process.

Sample Questions

1. When and how did you become involved in the NVWIA?

2. What were the events in the community that preceded the creation of the NVWIA, that is, how did the organization begin and how has it evolved from there?

3. What are the main goals and/or principles driving the organization? What types of activities did it undertake in its formative months (first year)?

4. In the beginning, who did your organization represent? How did it recruit members? How was it structured?

5. In your opinion, how was the organization originally perceived by the community? What was its role in the community?
II. General theme: On-going Work in the Community
The current experience of a feminist-informed organization operating in a rural community.

Sample Questions

6. In your opinion, is NVWIA a feminist-informed organization (based on feminist principles)? Has this affected its ability to influence action?

7. Do women in Merritt and area face barriers in terms of fully participating in their community? What do you think is the role of NVWIA in overcoming barriers to women's participation in community decision-making?

8. What community projects has NVWIA undertaken recently? In your opinion, have these projects promoted the well-being of women, families and the community at large (improved the quality of life in Merritt )?

9. What has been the response to NVWIA initiated projects
   - from women of the area?
   - from the overall community?
   - other community-based/social service groups?
   - from the City of Merritt?

10. What has been the impact of the work done by the organization in the community? Please share stories of successes, shortcomings and future directions.
NICOLA VALLEY WOMEN IN ACTION

INFORMATION PACKAGE

Contents:
Mission Statement
History
By-Laws
Constitution
Application Form

Prepared November, 1994 By:

Nicola Valley Women in Action
2025 Granite Avenue, P. O. Box 2849
Merritt, British Columbia V0K 2B0
NICOLA VALLEY WOMEN IN ACTION

MISSION STATEMENT

Nicola Valley Women In Action is a voluntary society made up of individuals who are concerned about conditions facing women in our communities. We seek to initiate and promote measures that will bring about a healthy social, economic, emotional, and physical environment for women in society. The organization facilitates these measures through direct service, public education and reform advocacy.

STATEMENT OF PHILOSOPHY

WE BELIEVE THAT:

1. Social justice is a "fair distribution of benefits and burdens in society".

2. Social justice cannot be realized in a society that discriminates on the basis of gender.

3. There continue to be incidences of systemic and individual discrimination on the basis of gender.

4. Women do not have equal access to opportunities and benefits because of the fact that they are women. Further, women carry a disproportionate burden in society because they are women.

5. No person can ever be free in a society in which the rights and potential of women are constrained.

6. All people have the right to live in a safe and caring community and the responsibility to speak out when this right is infringed.

7. By encouraging active participation in creating solutions to social injustices affecting women, social change is possible that will result in a better society for all people.
Several years ago, Ann Davis, Regional Director for the Ministry of Equality for Women, contacted Jo-anne Portman of Merritt to discuss the possibility of exploring the needs and possible lack of resources for women and families in the Nicola Valley. Jo-anne, in turn, invited local agencies and private citizens to meet and discuss these concerns.

At the first meeting, representation from all sectors of the community were in attendance. (i.e., social service agencies, community health, Native health, members and elders of Native and Indo-Canadian communities, students from NVIT, homemakers, local business women and ranchers) Ann Davis also attended and addressed the group of 57. Luanne Armstrong chaired the meeting and numerous decisions were made including the following:

- A list of over 100 concerns was developed.
- An interim committee was chosen to coordinate the application for non-profit society status and also to seek funding to hire a co-ordinator to do an in-depth Needs Assessment of the community.
- A name for the society was voted on after several suggestions were put forth, one being Nicola Valley Women in Action, as suggested by Mayor Clara Norgard.

- Nicola Valley Women in Action was officially incorporated as a non-profit society under the B.C. Society Act on June 11, 1992. Its first Directors were Eleanor Brown, Jo-anne Portman, Sheila Sabey, Rita Tatley, Gloria Moses, Betty Ann McDonnell and Jagjit Panghali.

With funding from the Ministry of Equality for Women, Luanne Armstrong was hired to do a Needs Assessment of the community in September 1991. The Needs Assessment was completed in November 1991 with 12 main issues emerging, including victim services, resources for women who had experienced sexual and/or physical abuse, cross cultural issues and lack of day care services. (A copy of the Executive Summary is available in the NVWIA office.)
Funding from the Ministry of Equality for Women also allowed us to open the Family Center on November 14, 1992 with Vivian Roy as Coordinator. The Family Center provided information on community resources, issues of concern to women and made referrals when appropriate.

In reflection, this dedicated group of women gave all their energies to ensuring that possibilities became realities. Their mission was to enable the women of the Nicola Valley to meet their needs with adequate services and resources. NVWIA has continued to develop and evolve since its early beginnings, lending its support to several community programs as described below:

- Victim Services became a reality in October 1992, with Britt Marie Poynting as Coordinator, and today has 17 volunteers in Merritt and Logan Lake. The funding is multi-level, coming from the City of Merritt and the Federal and Provincial Governments.

- With the combined funding from the Ministries of the Attorney General, Social Services and Women’s Equality and the joint efforts of NVWIA and the Nicola Valley Human Services Association, Nicola Family Therapy opened in the spring of 1993. The therapy center hired two full time therapists and an office administrator.

- The Assaultive Men’s Program also began in the spring of 1993 with funding from the Ministry of the Attorney General. This program currently has one part-time facilitator, Mike Watkins and co-facilitator, Sara Williams.

- In March 1993, Phyllis Irvine was hired as the new co-ordinator of the Family Center to continue the work initiated by Vivian Roy on cultural awareness. Several successful workshops were held in the fall of 1993 with the combined effort of NVWIA and Merritt Legal Services. Funding was provided by several sources including Heritage Canada, the City of Merritt, the Solicitor General, Legal Services and B.C. Multi-culturalism.

- In September of this year a much needed part-time NVWIA administrator was hired, Colleen Eichhorst, and with her skills and capabilities the various programs are on track and running smoothly.

NVWIA is pleased with the progress the community has made in addressing those needs as identified in the Needs Assessment. As outlined in our recently drafted Mission Statement, we are now looking forward to future possibilities and challenges that will further the cause of women in the Nicola Valley and elsewhere.
1. MEMBERSHIP

1.1 Membership shall be open to all persons interested in the advancement of women in the Nicola Valley.

1.2 Any such person who has signed a membership application and paid the membership fees set out by the most recent Annual General Meeting shall become a member of the Nicola Valley Women in Action.

1.3 A member shall cease to be a member if:
   1.3.1 He or she notifies the Chairperson of the Membership Committee of his or her wish to resign from the Association, or
   1.3.2 He or she fails to pay the annual membership fee within a month of the Annual General Meeting, or
   1.3.3 He or she is expelled from the Association by a resolution approved by seventy-five (75) percent of the members present and voting at a General Meeting of the Association.
   1.3.4 All members are in goodstanding except a member who has failed to pay his or her current annual membership fee or any other subscription or debt due and owing by him or her to the society and he or she is not in goodstanding so long as the debt remains unpaid.

2. GENERAL MEETINGS

2.1 The Annual General Meeting shall be held by the end of the fall of each year.

2.2 The location and date of the Annual General Meeting shall be decided by the Board of Directors.

2.3 Other General Meetings may be called at any time by the Board of Directors. A General Meeting shall also be called on the demand of not less than ten (10) percent of the membership by written notice to the President. Such notice shall include a statement of the reason of the meeting.

2.4 At least fourteen (14) days written notice of a General Meeting must be given to the members. This notice shall include the agenda and purpose of the meeting.

2.5 The quorum at a General Meeting shall consist of ten (10) percent of the membership, or seven (7) persons, whichever is greater.

2.6 Meetings shall be governed by Robert's Rules of Order. Voting by proxy shall not be allowed.
3. BOARD OF DIRECTORS

3.1 The Board of Directors of the Association is responsible for conducting the business of the Association between General Meetings.

3.2 The Board of Directors shall consist of the following elected representatives:
   - President
   - Vice-President
   - Secretary (act as Director as well)
   - Treasurer (act as Director as well)
   - Three (3) Directors

3.3 A quorum of the Board of Directors shall be four (4).

3.4 All meetings of the Board of Directors shall ordinarily be open to any member of the Association.

3.5 The Board of Directors shall meet at least three (3) times each year.

3.6 All elected members of the Board of Directors shall have equal voting privileges at all Board of Directors’ meetings.

3.7 The Board of Directors may add, at any time, representatives from related organizations, to the Board. These representatives will not have voting privileges.

4. EXECUTIVE

4.1 The President, Vice-President, Secretary and the Treasurer comprise the Executive of the Association.

4.2 The Executive is responsible for conducting the business of the Association between the Board of Directors’ meetings and for overseeing projects sponsored by the Association.

4.3 A quorum of the Executive shall be three (3).

4.4 The Executive shall meet at the request of any member of the Executive.

4.5 All meetings of the Executive shall ordinarily be open to any member of the Association.

4.6 PRESIDENT:
   4.6.1 The President ensures that the business of the Association is carried forward and that matters of interest are reported to the members.
   4.6.2 The President is the spokesperson of the Association.
   4.6.3 The President or her/his designate presides at all General, Board of Directors’, and Executive meetings.
4.7 VICE-PRESIDENT:
4.7.1 The Vice-President shall assume the duties of the President in the absence of the President.
4.7.2 In the event that the office of the President becomes vacant, the Vice-President shall be appointed by the Executive to take that office. That Vice-President shall be replaced as specified below:
4.7.3 The Vice-President's chair will be appointed by the Executive, to fill the vacancy until the next General Meeting.

4.8 TREASURER:
4.8.1 The Treasurer is the custodian of all monies and financial records of the Association. The Treasurer may delegate this duty to others agreed to by the Executive. Nevertheless, the Treasurer will oversee the management of project funds.
4.8.2 The Treasurer prepares financial statements for the Annual Report and for the Annual General Meeting, recommends a budget and dues levels for the upcoming year for the Board of Directors to present to the Annual General Meeting, and prepares other reports as requested by the President or the Board of Directors.
4.8.3 The Treasurer prepares the Annual Report to the Registrar of Societies.

4.9 SECRETARY:
4.9.1 The Secretary ensures that records and minutes of the meetings are taken and kept.
4.9.2 The Secretary maintains a record of all correspondence received and sent, and ensures that correspondence comes to the attention of the appropriate person.

5. ELECTIONS
5.1 All Board Members shall be elected to a one (1) year term of office.
5.2 All members in good standing at the Annual General Meeting may vote in the election of Board Members.
5.3 All newly-elected Board Members will take office following the Annual General Meeting.
5.4 No Board Member may be elected to a third consecutive term in the same position.
5.5 A Board Member may be removed from office at a General Meeting by two-thirds vote of the members eligible to vote for his or her position.
5.6 Should a vacancy other than that of the President occur, the Executive may appoint a member to fill the vacancy until the next General Meeting.
6. FINANCIAL OPERATIONS

6.1 The Treasurer, together with the President and one other member of the Board of Directors, is empowered to operate an account for the Association at a bank or credit union. The signature of any two of the three named above will be required to withdraw funds from or write cheques on this account.

6.2 The Board of Directors shall submit a budget for approval at the Annual General Meeting. Any subsequent expenditure in the excess of one thousand ($1,000.00) dollars not included in the approved budget and not covered by unbudgeted income, must have prior approval of a General Meeting.

6.3 If required, an auditor shall be appointed by the Board of Directors prior to the Annual General Meeting. The Auditor shall determine whether the Treasurer’s report gives a fair and accurate picture of the financial activities of the Association and shall so report to the Annual General Meeting.

6.4 The Association shall not borrow money or contract a debt except by a resolution approved by seventy-five (75) percent of the members present and voting at a General Meeting.

7. COMMITTEES

7.1 A General Meeting or the Board of Directors may establish committees as required. Each such committee shall be given written terms of reference, shall have a fixed term and shall report to the body which established it.

8. BRANCH SOCIETIES

8.1 The members may, by resolution at any General Meeting, set up a branch office consistent with the requirements of the Societies’ Act.

9. AMENDMENTS

9.1 Amendments to the By-Laws may be made by a resolution approved by seventy-five (75) percent of the members present and voting at a General Meeting.
CONSTITUTION

1. The name of the society is the NICOLA VALLEY WOMEN IN ACTION hereafter referred to as the Society.

2. The purposes of the Society are:
   a) to promote awareness of women's issues and needs in the Nicola Valley;
   b) to provide support services for the women and families of the Nicola Valley;
   c) to conduct research and studies regarding women's and family issues in the Nicola Valley.

3. On the winding up or dissolution of the Society, funds or assets remaining after all debts have been paid shall be transferred to a charitable institution with purposes similar to those of this Society, or, if this cannot be done, to another charitable institution recognized by Revenue Canada as qualified under the provisions of the Income Tax Act of Canada. This paragraph is unalterable.

4. The purpose of this Society shall be carried out without gain for its members, and any profits or other accretions to the Society shall be used for promoting its purpose. This paragraph is unalterable.